

*THE DYNAMICS  
OF LITERATURE*

NATHAN COMFORT STARR



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## The Auctor to his Moost Dere Lady

Hadde I but space ynough, my Lady dere,  
To tellen al the thynges, as they were,  
With which thou esed hast the toylsom way  
Of him that writeth resonys nyght and day,  
Thanne sholde I borwe strengthe of al that writen,—  
Hym Aristotle, and Ovyde smiten  
By Venus sone, and hym that song the joye  
And eek the peyne of werreyng at Troye;  
But syn that oon short lyf were al to smal,  
Have heer my boke who hast my herte in thral.

## *FOREWORD*

THIS book aims to develop the faculty of making judgments about literature. It does not pretend to tell how to read "efficiently", it is not a systematic discussion of literary "types," nor is it a treatise on aesthetics. It makes no claim to new and startling theories, rather it attempts to reaffirm certain basic principles which give strength to literature just as those same principles give richness and meaning to the life which literature reflects.

The reader of this book will notice that I have spent some time in close analysis of words, their implications and overtones. In these passages I have tried to reveal the *quality* of the experience described as clearly as possible, so that readers may understand the ways in which words may take on the force of associative meaning. To those who feel, with Wordsworth, that "We murder to dissect" I can only say that this kind of dissection, far from destroying the vividness of individual elements and their relationship to the whole, can reveal clearly the organic structure through which art takes form before our eyes.

The work of art, however, is more than the sum of its parts. Greatness in literature is not the product of style, or structure, or appropriateness of language. It is not even ensured by lofty concept. Rather it springs from the harmonious combination whereby divers faculties unite to produce one common good. This being so, I believe it is important to estimate literature not only in terms of craftsmanship but also in terms of idea. What kind of world does the author describe? What is the good he wishes to achieve? How does his attitude illuminate the concept of man

as a creature of free will, capable of self-knowledge and self-determination, even when confronted by forces which may destroy him? These are questions which I believe must be answered if criticism is to regard literature not merely as a triumph of skills but also as an interpretation of the spirit which gives unique power to human life.

Most of this book was written during a year's residence in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, and I wish to express my appreciation to the officials of the Library of the University of North Carolina for their courtesy and helpfulness to a visiting scholar. I am indebted also to Professor George Raleigh Coffman of the University of North Carolina for his helpful suggestions. To Charles Mills, Esq., of Chapel Hill I am grateful for practical advice and vigorous encouragement. And whether he likes it or not, my old friend Professor Summerfield Baldwin 3d, of the Department of History at the University of Akron, must consider himself partly responsible for this book, for he not only gave valuable suggestions in the first stages of writing, but also, during long years of close friendship, made me the beneficiary of his prodigious learning and incisive analysis. To my students over a number of years I owe much. Generations of them have asked me the difficult question *Why?* and I hope that they have learned as much from being put on their mettle as I have. In addition I wish to thank the various publishers and authors for their courtesy in allowing me to use material covered by copyright. The reader will find these kindnesses acknowledged in detail where the quotations appear. I set the final seal of my gratitude in the Dedication.

N. C. S.

*Winter Park, Florida  
June 13, 1945*

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To read well—that is, to read true books in a true spirit—is a noble exercise, and one that will task the reader more than any exercise which the customs of the day esteem. It requires a training such as the athletes underwent, the steady intention almost of the whole life to this object. Books must be read as deliberately and reservedly as they were written.

THOREAU

## *THE CREATIVE READER*

The Imagination may be compared to Adam's dream—he awoke and found it truth.—KEATS

AT THE OUTSET it is essential to understand that reading is fruitful only when the reader shares the creative experience with the author. In literature more than in any other art the power of aesthetic expression becomes apparent only when it is welcomed as an ally by strong forces all ready to act. These forces must move toward a re-creation of literature in terms of the reader's own capacities and needs.

This idea of creative activity on the part of the reader may at first seem rather baffling. Yet it need not be so if we remember that we all create, or are capable of creating, by giving an objective purpose to our activities, either physical or intellectual; we all try to achieve some active integration of our lives. Possibly we are also misled by our feeling that after all the author is describing a fictitious world, or at least one in which we have taken no part. True, when we read we are removed at least one degree from reality. This does not mean, however, that the fictitious world, when properly understood, remains simply a picturesque spectacle. If it is seen as the interplay of forces which affect not only the characters' lives but also our own, then it will suddenly glow with new significance.

In other words, the reader is more than a translator who mechanically extracts literal meaning, he is a creator in the sense that through active participation he builds upon vicarious experience

for his own greater understanding and for his progressive enrichment. In one sense literature which endures does so, not because it was once created, but because sensitive readers have re-created it again and again. This sense of participation, of cooperative effort, is absolutely essential to intelligent reading. It is imperative to feel that the work was made by a man who through the mysterious workings of talent or genius described the experiences we might have had and said the things we have probably wished to say. Only then will literature become a power.

Through this process of re-creation the reader will come to realize that the basic satisfactions of literature are dynamic. This being so, they should not be taken for granted as established beyond question by others who have found them good, nor regarded as truisms so self-evident that any insistence on them is quite unnecessary. One cannot say too often that the values which underlie literature are the values of life itself, translated into terms of imaginative persuasion. Reading, therefore, is not simply a polite accomplishment, a carefree picnic in the fields of the *belles lettres* or a gulping down of "what every educated man should know." It is also a great deal more; for the reader who is alert and active will eventually realize that the study of literature can prepare his mind as effectively for the confusing decisions of our turbulent times as any other kind of study. No one who has really wrestled with the simple question, "Why is this particular arrangement of words good writing?" could possibly doubt that he has undergone a toughening intellectual discipline.

The reader, then, grows with and through the work; that is, of course, if he wishes to do so. He sees how the words create the illusion of experience by letting his mind play upon the situation before him. He trains himself to discover how the author through imaginative suggestion intensifies our sense of kinship with the

natural world and with other men. This does not mean simply an unthinking identification with emotional excitement. It means rather the use of emotion to give force and personal conviction to experience. The rational faculty which judges the value of things should operate simultaneously and cooperatively with the imagination to direct our attitudes to constructive ends.

The first step in the re-creative process is clear thinking. The rational faculty establishes the objective image of the work before our minds, it records and relates details. Through it the reader follows the development of ideas, and judges them, through it he perceives design or order in the work as a whole and in its component parts. In other words he must see the thing before him, both as it unfolds bit by bit and afterwards when it lies like a map under his eyes. In some works this is a simple matter. The account of Robinson Crusoe's salvaging material from the wreck, for example, is so lucid and straightforward that we read with very little mental effort. In others, where the emphasis is not on narrative or the development of an idea but rather on individual impression, the process of re-creation is not so easy. Sterne's *Sentimental Journey* we can understand only if we overlook disjointed, self-conscious narrative sketches and concentrate on Sterne's defense of Sentiment. In our own day the reader's desire for clarity is even more severely taxed. Much of modern poetry and fiction is so esoteric that often order and meaning seem to have gone completely by the board. The poems of Gertrude Stein, James Joyce's *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* have made capital out of incoherence. I shall have more to say about the validity of this method elsewhere. The point I wish to make at present, however, is that we must not damn these works until we have discovered, slowly and painfully, what they mean and what the author is driving at. Without this conscientious ef-

fort to know and to understand, criticism becomes a mere parading of shallow prejudices or ironic whimsy. The anatomy of the work, then, the directive line, must be as clear before our eyes as we can make it.

In order to perceive this directive line the reader should try continually to get at the essence of the work, to establish the individuality which exists as clearly in books as in people. Here an exercise in translation may help. The techniques and attitudes in the book, since they explain human adjustment to situation, may very well be viewed as part of the author's personality. With this in mind, it is sometimes useful to build up a character sketch of the author solely on the basis of the attitudes implicit in his work. The work of art will then be illuminated by a personality expressed in certain definite ways and it can then be evaluated in terms of human activity striving toward an end, be it truly expansive or merely dissipative. In the kind of translation which I suggest the man illuminates the work. Notice, for example, how the picture of Robert Frost which we get from his poem *Two Tramps in Mud-Time* can help us to analyze the quality of his work. Here he describes his thoughts as two wandering lumberjacks stop to watch him split wood. The scene is set simply, yet vividly.

Out of the mud two strangers came  
And caught me splitting wood in the yard.

The poet's mind is clear and cool. It is an acute, sensitive mind; it can give fresh suggestions of immediacy to the bluebird which "comes tenderly up to alight," or to water running in the wheel ruts, or to

The weight of an ax head poised aloft,  
The grip on earth of outspread feet,  
And life of muscles rocking soft  
And smooth and moist in vernal heat.

Here is a man of humility, close to the earth, close to those who work upon it. Compassionate and gentle, he thinks of what the tramps have a right to expect.

Nothing on either side was said.  
They knew they had but to stay their stay  
And all their logic would fill my head  
As that I had no right to play  
With what was another man's work for gain.\*

And thus we might go through the whole poem, evoking from it the picture of a singularly candid, sensitive, and compassionate personality. In thus personifying the man, the character of his work begins to emerge clearly, and by transfer we can apply to it the same kind of critical evaluation we might use in thinking of an acquaintance. Whether or not we wish to try this experiment in translation, it is absolutely essential for full satisfaction that we fix in mind the individual quality which the author gives to his writing.

We must grasp, however, not only the character or essence of the book, we must also understand what the writer hopes to do. What was his purpose? Very often he leaves us under no possibility of misunderstanding. Edmund Spenser, in his prefatory letter to Sir Walter Raleigh, stated that his purpose in *The Faerie Queene* was "to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline" (though as we read Spenser we wonder whether his purpose was confined only to this). George Bernard Shaw seldom leaves us the luxury of guessing about the objectives of his plays. In his prefaces he takes the reader fully and boisterously into his confidence. Henry Fielding, likewise, in *The Adventures of Joseph Andrews*, is clearly revealing the purposes of

\* Robert Frost, *A Further Range* (New York, Henry Holt and Co., Inc., 1925). Reprinted by permission of the publishers.

his own story in the discursive passages on the novelist's craft. More often than not, however, the intention is not so baldly stated. Then we will have to distill it for ourselves, and this is no easy job, for different readers may find varying purposes in the same book. We must then find the one answer which will include the widest possible comprehension of the whole work. One reader might say of *King Lear* that its purpose was to reveal the dangers of family disloyalty; another that it was a study of psychopathic stubbornness and pride. Certainly *King Lear* is these, and yet it is more; it is the struggle of an old man to achieve psychic serenity against titanic evil within and without.

To see the all-inclusive intention of a work requires a good deal of practice in cumulative understanding. Here the author, even when he does not definitely state the purpose, may put plenty of road signs on the way. He may suggest his intention by expressing his opinion of a character or action in objective reflection, he may speak openly through a principal actor, he may establish a clearly unified sensuous feeling through impressionistic writing, or he may give us hints in the title. The words *Vanity Fair*, for example, immediately suggest some of the turbulence of society in Thackeray's novel, the title *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, taken from a sermon by John Donne, an extract from which appears on the fly-leaf, is strikingly successful in giving us a foretaste of a new depth of compassion on Hemingway's part.

It must be clear that the approaches I have suggested imply more reflection than we ordinarily give when we race through a novel, or when we read a poem "to see what it's about." What I have tried to stress is constant alertness rather than unthinking assimilation. This alertness, as I have said, must be directed toward seeing the work as an objective entity developing toward

a definite purpose in accordance with certain assumptions on the part of the author. This aspect of literature is judged and clarified by the rational faculty, it is the task of the imagination to move us to complete acceptance.

When they come to using the imagination readers often have trouble. They can see a story or a situation as it unfolds before them, they can recognize good structure and bad, they can trace the course of an idea. But when asked to accept something which demands unusual imaginative activity many people instinctively stiffen. They stiffen probably because in the first place they think that the world of literature is not the real world, probably also because they dimly see that in order to understand this new set of relationships they will have to do some drastic reordering of their thought processes. To people of this kind exercise of the imagination through literature may seem like a shameless intrusion on their intellectual privacy.

Yet this privacy must be invaded, it must be opened to the air and sun if the reader is to think of himself as a re-creator of literature. New awareness brings new wisdom, and gradually as the mind grows more sensitive it discovers fresh meaning in uncharted areas of experience. Like any other faculty, the imagination can be developed by training. Through this training the individual can perceive more and more the wonder of his unique gifts and rewards as man; he can delight in a new freedom of discovery.

Perhaps the first step in this direction is to realize that we should not be ashamed of emotion—particularly when it arises in response to an idea of good and when it denotes constructive enrichment rather than the irresponsible dissipation of energy. This expansion of feeling we can and should cultivate, since it extends the boundaries of perception and intensifies the awareness

of subtle varieties of satisfaction we have only dimly perceived before.

We should recognize, however, that training the imagination is not so simple a matter as taking vitamin pills for a physical deficiency. As with all mental and emotional readjustments the change is likely to be a gradual one; so slow that one's progress seems almost imperceptible, unless measured in terms of months or even years. It is not a question of doggedly willing imaginative power to appear, for the imagination cannot be coerced; it can only be led by a kind of soft, affectionate persuasion.

If this training is to be successful one should approach the unique quality of experience described by the author with an alert and wondering curiosity. Let me use a crude analogy. Some years ago I made the helpful discovery that if, when the dentist was pressing hard on the drill, I concentrated as closely as I could on the pain, it tended to become not pain alone but an interesting sensation which I could examine. Something of the same kind can happen when an unskilled reader centers his attention narrowly upon an imaginative situation. It ceases to be merely an unfamiliar picture with fuzzy edges and begins to show on these edges a few faint sparkles of light. As the reader grows more sensitive, the picture becomes more and more suffused with this light, and more quickly, until in the last stages of imaginative acceptance it springs into incandescence. It is, then, a matter of seeing ourselves anew, at the core of multiform impression.

Reading aloud, or developing the ability to hear the sound even when reading silently, will color one's first impression by adding the subtle variations of tone and accent that give a musical quality to literature. The other mediums of artistic expression can help us in stimulating the imagination. Mendels-

sohn's *Midsummer Night's Dream Overture* with its elvish delicacy may help us to catch the magic of Shakespeare's comedy, and the haunting oboe melody in Richard Strauss's *Don Juan* may for the moment explain Juan's love-longing better than Byron could himself. There are innumerable other examples of kinship: Mallarmé's *Après-midi d'un faune* and Debussy's ballet, Verdi's *Otello* and Shakespeare's tragedy, Deems Taylor's representation of Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*, Goethe's *Faust* and Liszt's *Faust Symphony*. Here the arts walk side by side in a companionship which will greatly increase the sensitivity of the reader. There is also stimulation in the more fugitive medium of the movies. The emotional impact of Liam O'Flaherty's story, *The Informer*, is preserved by the remarkable picture made from it. Likewise Edna May Oliver has given us Betsy Trotwood and Lady Catherine de Bourgh in the flesh. And the Hollywood version of *Wuthering Heights*, whatever its faults, at least gave vivid pictorial equivalence to the brooding landscape which Emily Brontë described. The reader may and should bring cognate impressions to bear in giving vital force to his imagination.

Furthermore, readers should never forget that the excitement felt and described by an author is an excitement to which they, too, have a right. That is, it represents a body of experience which may differ from theirs in degree but not in kind. If there is anything mysterious in the nature of literary creation it is the mystery of our minds also; if there is any acute awareness on the part of the poet it is also the awareness of every man who catches the message to the inward ear. The sensitizing of the imagination, then, depends upon the immediate illumination of the author's response by the widening circle of the reader's own responses, as

based on experiences of the same general kind, and an analogous, though perhaps hitherto unrealized, emotional quality.

There are various degrees of imaginative satisfaction which the reader can feel. The most obvious, and the most simple in quality, is the pleasure of vicarious adventure remote from one's own experience. The release which we feel in reading Scott's *Ivanhoe* or Melville's *Typee* is based upon simple projection into a narrative situation of pleasing strangeness or of heroic quality. The transfer from author to reader is quickly and easily made. A somewhat more complex response is aroused when we see man not merely as an agent and an object in a world of adventure but rather as an individual who moves in two worlds, whose pragmatic existence is constantly affected by intangible values, by the sudden insight which finds kinship between the real and the ideal. I have used the word sudden deliberately, because it suggests the shock of surprise when we see the world of men and women, of inanimate things, and of emotion and thought suddenly illuminated by a new light.

This illumination will come only as the result of our own effort. That is, we must match the author's conviction with conviction of our own. We must see in what ways his imaginative experience can bring to mind our less-formed but no less valid reachings toward power of feeling.

The concentration of the author's feeling and its power to release our own can be seen clearly in the sonnet. Let us look for a moment at a poem in this form ascribed to the Elizabethan poet, Joshua Sylvester.

Were I as base as is the lowly plain,  
And you, my love, as high as heaven above,  
Yet should the thoughts of me, your humble swain,  
Ascend to heaven in honor of my love.

Were I as high as heaven above the plain,  
And you, my love, as humble and as low  
As are the deepest bottoms of the main,  
Wheresoe'er you were, with you my love should go.  
Were you the earth, dear love, and I the skies,  
My love should shine on you, like to the sun,  
And look upon you with ten thousand eyes,  
Till heaven waxed blind, and till the world were done  
Wheresoe'er I am—below, or else above you—  
Wheresoe'er you are, my heart shall truly love you.

What is it in this poem which helps to make it a peculiarly happy expression of naive and moving constancy? Unquestionably it is the way in which the reader's imagination is immediately impelled to extension in terms of his own experience by familiar images and situations sensitively expressed. The whole mood of adoration is illuminated by the figures of speech which, in our excitement, we would like to use if we could. The alternation of mountain and plain, the use of the heavens above looking down with ten thousand eyes—all these are immediately translatable in terms of the awe which strikes us as we see the snow-capped range rising above the plains, or as we look with something akin to fear on myriads of stars in a midnight sky. In other words, if we read the poem not only hearing the sincere vows of a lover but also catching the whole flamboyant, active and energizing quality of our own sensations, especially when strongly moved by love, the texture of the sonnet will suddenly glow with color.

All such figurative expressions, however, must be emotionally appropriate. The author's imagination, in order to give us the energizing quality necessary, must express itself in terms which do no violence to our sense of congruity. This does not mean, of course, that the author may not leave our world for fairyland, or hell, or heaven. The supernatural can be as "actual," in the broad

sense, as the natural. What I mean is that the image must be closely tied with the object or the situation. Often in the Elizabethan sonnets authors indulged in "conceits," in elaborate and formalized manners of expression. Some of these are harmless, or even effective; others are clearly damaging. For example, when Sir Philip Sidney in the 76th sonnet of his sequence *Astrophel and Stella* says:

She comes, and straight therewith her shining twins do move  
Their rays to me . . .

he completely fails to give any force to his image of Stella's eyes because they are described in terms so bizarre that the imagination finds nothing to work on after it has made the leap.

Notice, however, how masterfully Swift has been able to enlist our active sympathy, and to send the imagination on errands of its own in the concluding part of his essay, "A Meditation upon a Broomstick." Here, as we see, the concept is even more unusual than Sidney's notion of the eyes as twins, yet we feel no damaging inappropriateness because the author's whole purpose is to shock the reader not merely into *seeing* but above all into *thinking*, through a fantastic distortion.

A broomstick, perhaps, you will say, is an emblem of a tree standing on its head; and pray what is man, but a topsy-turvy creature, his animal faculties perpetually mounted on his rational, his head where his heels should be, grovelling on the earth! and yet, with all his faults, he sets up to be a universal reformer and corrector of abuses, a remover of grievances, rakes into every slut's corner of Nature, bringing hidden corruption to the light, and raises a mighty dust where there was none before; sharing deeply all the while in the very same pollutions he pretends to sweep away: his last days are spent in slavery to women, and generally the least deserving, till, worn out to the

stumps, like his brother besom, he is either kicked out of doors, or made use of to kindle flames for others to warm themselves by

Here the power of Swift's indignation—and compassion—is vastly increased by the ease with which we enter into the situation. The humble broom, one of the most ordinary household objects, becomes the starting point for observations which move us all the more swiftly and strongly for the familiar flashes of life which are revealed.

Our feelings are stirred, after this sight of the commonplace, by the ancient problem of all civilized societies, the fate of the reformer, and we catch the overtones of traditional distaste for the "corrector of abuses" in Swift's biting irony. From being merely an ingenious comparison of man to a broomstick the passage develops to the point where we may range over great areas of our experience and belief.

This ability to lead the reader to associate his own experience with that of the author is shown perhaps most strikingly in the romantic poets. Coleridge has suggested the virtue of the strange, the supernatural; Keats the incredible richness and variety of sense impression. In Wordsworth we see the brooding mind which senses the animating spirit within the natural world. Recall, for example, the well-known passage in "Tintern Abbey":

For I have learned  
To look on nature, not as in the hour  
Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes  
The still, sad music of humanity,  
Nor harsh, nor grating, though of ample power  
To chasten and subdue. And I have felt  
A presence that disturbs me with the joy  
Of elevated thoughts, a sense sublime,  
Of something far more deeply interfused,  
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,

And the round ocean and the living air,  
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man,  
A motion and a spirit, that impels  
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,  
And rolls through all things

In this passage our imaginations are swiftly and powerfully put to work, not through the re-creation and the examination of a specific image, but rather through the force of a general proposition. This proposition is not logical in statement or in quality, it results upon the assumption that to nearly every man in the world has come at some time or another a suggestion or a conviction that "the blue sky" and "the mind of man" are indissolubly connected in some fruitful way, that in all the grandeur of external nature there must be something more than physical mass. As we see the waves breaking rhythmically on the shore, as we watch the enormous orange sun sinking into the ocean are we truly prepared to say that the world is matter alone? The doubt that comes to us all—or perhaps we might say the conviction that comes to many—gives these lines of Wordsworth an uncommon transmutative force. We have all of us in one fashion or another stood silent upon this commanding hill.

In the examples just cited I have tried to show characteristic ways in which literature can add the autonomous power of the reader's imagination to that of the author. Sylvester suggested to us naive, unspeculative wonder at the physical world: mountain, plain, and ocean, as related to a calmly unshakable love. In Swift a humble and familiar object leads us to most ingenious and searching thoughts on the conduct of man. With Wordsworth the physical world is not, as in Sylvester, a formal standard of comparison, but rather it is interpenetrated and identified with spirit itself. The differences are strongly marked. All of them

have in common, however, the faculty of arousing immediate association with the reader, and of suggesting to him directions in which his own experience will be confirmed and enriched by that of the author.

Fruitful reading, then, depends upon re-creative association between reader and author through the directed activity of the intellect and the imagination. This activity should not cease when the book is finished; for our judgment should be based not entirely on the immediate reactions which come while reading but also and more permanently on the ordered and consolidated impressions of our reflection whenever the work thrusts itself into our minds. We should stimulate this process as much as we can. Rereading is extremely helpful, for it reveals in any work of genuine power new facets of interpretation and new subtlety of suggestion which had escaped us before. Indeed this is one mark of great writing, that it may offer us continuing and increasing enrichment. Even if we do not wish to read the complete work again we should consciously recall it by keeping clear important scenes and characters, and by weighing the author's attitudes after action and idea have lost the sharp edge of immediate effect. We should remember and savor our initial delight. In this way we will begin to find that in time the work becomes a part of us, of our body of wisdom. Whether or not this conscious effort should go to the length of formal notes or critical comments every reader can decide for himself. There are many effective ways to recall and solidify. Vastly more important than techniques here, however, is the reader's conviction that he must build upon what he has read.

I have insisted throughout this chapter on the necessity of the re-creation of literature through the close union of author and reader. This union should take place on as high a plane as possible.

This means that the reader should come to recognize the variety and richness of effect possible in great literature, wherein a comprehensive pattern of life appears before us. In this pattern we apprehend a new sense of order, we react to the stimulus of the individual in action, we perceive the grace and joyousness that bind us to the world and the faith which lifts us above it. And through the whole we see the familiar transformed by fresh, new meaning. Of all the arts literature most persuades us of the qualities of experience.

Is the reading of literature, then, only a solemn and priestly office? I do not think so, in spite of the high mysteries it reveals. There is a place and a time for everything, and if we wish to enjoy a carefree picnic, we will probably find the peak of Parnassus somewhat austere. It is well to remember that there are as many kinds of writing as there are experiences in life, serving needs of widely different sorts and varying degrees of importance. By wide and diversified reading we not only receive different kinds of enjoyment but we also gain an understanding of what literature can accomplish in many directions. From this will come the flexibility and openness of mind which will armor us against dogmatism.

The mind should not be so open, however, that ideas flow through it as easily as water through a sieve. Catholicity of taste is valueless without penetrative judgment. In works of pure diversion the reader should not confuse temporary and permanent enjoyment, he should not be misled by dissipative excitement; and works which develop ideas or seriously analyze conduct he should be able to evaluate with an active rather than a passive liberalism. This is to say that he should understand not only how well the work was done within its scope, but also how successfully the author revealed man knowing and realizing himself at his

best. This best may not always be achieved, but at least the spirit which impels man to good should be a dominant force in any work which we call great. The final and highest act of criticism, then, is a synthesis, a process of concentration. After the reader has opened his mind tolerantly and flexibly to the author's breadth of information he should then penetrate vertically to the heart of the work. And the deeper he is able to go the more strongly he will feel that he and the author have become part of one force, part of a shaping and energizing strength.

## *THE TRUE AND LIVELY WORD*

Seeking the concrete and the individual, [French Gothic Architecture] sought the infinite as well, not with calm logic, but with the passionate intuition of faith, built with complicated stresses and balances, with soaring vaults, and silhouettes that disappear in space. . . . The quest for the concrete involves the infinite. . . . The paradox of mediaeval thought and art is its simultaneous search for the particular and the universal, rooted to earth the mediaeval soul aspired with unending confidence toward heaven.\*—C. R. MOREY

THE READER who seeks more than casual enjoyment should think again of the nature of literature and of the manner in which language is used. He will find this more than a mere academic exercise, for not only will he gain a new understanding of the ways in which the raw material is shaped into a work of art but he will also begin to discover the amazing richness of literature in its reflection of life.

He should think of the nature of the art itself. What does it use as its medium? Sound? Pictorial representation? Color? Though each of these has a part and an important part to play, no one of them is the raw material of literature. The author creates with language, with the words which transmit impressions and ideas from one man to another.

Think for a moment what this means. It means in the first place that the scene or the person is always described rather than represented; that is, the impression is translated for us in terms which

\* Charles R. Morey, *Christian Art* (New York, Longmans, Green and Co., Inc., 1935). Reprinted by permission of the publishers.

demand an unusual re-creative sense on the part of the reader. It means also that the form of the work is not a physical shape; it is not a geometrical or pictorial outline but is rather, as in music, a progressive development of a theme. Like music and acted drama, then, literature is a dynamic art in the sense that it is motion as the result of force. Unlike music and the drama, however, it can and should be halted, either when the reader wishes to lay the work aside for a time or when he wishes to consider what he has read.

The use of words as raw material not only makes literature a means of intellectual and emotional activity, it also provides the pressure against which the author achieves artistic effect. For language is a deceptively difficult medium. We use it easily in the thousand and one activities of daily life. Yet how hard it is to find words to express some of the thoughts and emotions that flash into our minds! Though the English language makes possible the projection of every conceivable shade of meaning the process of finding and arranging the words is not at all easy. Even in a work of simple exposition it is difficult enough. As I write this book, for example, meaning does not take shape in words without long and even painful wrestlings, without much pacing back and forth, and scratching out and starting over again. And if this is true of exposition how much more true must it be of literature which tries not merely to explain but also to persuade us through a re-creation of experience. The pattern of mental reaction even in the single emotional situation described in a sonnet is so variegated, so complex, and so mysterious that it can be crystallized only through rigorous concentration and discipline. This crystallization the artist achieves through his greater sensitivity and his more intuitive understanding of purposive form, so that the impression is transferred to the reader in terms which recapture its original force. All of this, again, is achieved against the pressure

of words, since the author must not only find the language to denote what he wishes to say but must also go beyond denotation to suggest the richness within the ebb and flow of action and of thought.

By its very medium of expression, writing is a projection of ourselves into the world of actions, ideas, and sense impressions. Of all the arts it gives the closest approximation to the completeness of experience, whether it be of the moment, or of months or years. Therefore it is strongly social by nature. Its field is not so much knowledge as conduct. For no matter whether the central character reflects or acts, whether he stands isolated or plays his part in a large group of society, the author's concern is always the problem of human satisfaction. Wordsworth rightly called the poet a man speaking to men. Very often this sense of the kinship between the poet and his fellow man is revealed in terms of definite ethical responsibility, in judgments on man as a member of society. This is especially true of English literature, in which from the earliest days the reflective and even introspective Anglo-Saxon mind has shown a strong moral bent. Whether or not such conscious judgments are part of the work, it is impossible to conceive of literature successfully divorced from the problem of our endless search for the good in human experience.

All this being so, the reader should question himself as to what he expects to gain from reading. What does literature do? Is its aim to please the reader, to delight; or must it rather edify and instruct him? Must it both delight and instruct, as Sir Philip Sidney and many other critics have held? I think that it should do both. Delight by itself connotes a search for mere pleasure, a hedonism which will not explain the whole of our benefit from reading. Instruction implies a somewhat rigid and doctrinaire moral rule, a judging by arbitrary ethical standards which may

be constrictive. To link the two words together, however, as the dual purpose of literature, is to create at least the suggestion of harnessing an ill-matched pair of horses. The pull does not seem quite even. A more general single term including within its scope both delight and instruction would probably suggest more clearly than the pairing of the two somewhat insulated words the cumulative access of power which comes to the reader through knowledge of the conduct of men, as well as the indispensably close connection between his own experiences and those described by the author. Literature, I would say, gives us the sense of *enrichment*. The author writes not only because he must, because the daemon that possesses him will not let him rest, but, even more, because he wishes to realize in himself and make productive for us the highest powers of mind and spirit.

The transfer of power from author to reader is more convincingly accomplished in literature than in the other arts because of the universal currency of language as the instrument of meaning, and because the words are used to describe things happening to people. We cannot very well say "I wish I could act like Brahms' First Symphony" without some pretty fine-spun aesthetics. We can very easily say, however, "I admire Robinson Crusoe's ingenuity," or "I think Don Quixote was not so crazy as he seemed," or "Ethan Frome would be a lot better off if he weren't so stubborn." Ideally, then, the road from initial stimulus through author to reader is a direct and well-traveled way. I hope in the rest of this book to show how we can use this way to the best advantage, and how we can avoid the winding indirection and deceptive terms that lead us to waste places.

We must first try to find out in what general ways we expect to derive enrichment from literature. Let us grant first the vivid sense of the immediacy of experience in reading which I have

already mentioned. What kind of response, however, helps us toward this end? We may read a piece of literature for any number of reasons, perhaps because we think we cannot be well informed unless we do, perhaps because we hope the story will be exciting. Even this is a start. But if we wish to make literature a real force we should try to make up our minds about basic satisfactions. Where do these satisfactions lie? In the broadest terms they lie in clarity, breadth of understanding, and elevation of spirit.

Clarity is achieved through the author's sense of form. By selection and arrangement of material in accordance with a single purpose he concentrates the attention upon the essential shape of things both in the seen and the unseen world. In doing so he shows the purpose which gives direction to experience. The works of the most highly endowed writers are in themselves guides to conduct in the larger sense, for they show us the intelligent regulation, the adjustment and reconciliation of diverse elements without which the world would fly into meaningless fragments. Such work, then, constitutes a conscious clarification of experience, not only on the part of the author but on the part of the reader as well, by his identification with the author through the re-creative process.

Clarification of our experience, however, will depend for its effectiveness upon how much we understand of the world. Here literature is a powerful instrument, for, to paraphrase Bacon, it has taken all life for its province. In fact it is no longer possible to assume that there are some subjects which are appropriate for treatment and some which are not. Through the development of realism in fiction and the application of psychological analysis to character the field of literature has been greatly widened. The author may now range where he pleases, subjects which formerly

would have been considered suspect can now be treated effectively, provided always that the author does not use sensationalism for its own sake and that he honors the dignity of humankind. In other words, sordidness in writing is now more to be gauged by the attitude of the author than by the nature of the material itself.

Literature gives us understanding, therefore, by presenting planned pictures of wide varieties of experience. The actuality of objects, events and people comes to us through the author's directive power. All kinds of persons may appear, the worker, the drifter, the artist, the businessman, the great and lesser figures of another day—the whole range of society is before us. If we read Dos Passos and William Faulkner we have no excuse not to know something of the underprivileged; if we read Sinclair Lewis we will have no excuse not to see more clearly the middle class. The author may show us the actuality of familiar life, or he may reconstruct a former age of society, or take us to an unfamiliar land. Always, however, the resources of literature try to make us see and understand, to comprehend the variety of experience and of action and interaction, and of kinds of human conduct.

Literature gives us breadth of understanding, in the second place, by showing us not only the outer world of appearance but the inner world of thought and feeling. We begin to see the patterns which explain apparently capricious action or which lie behind long and successful activity. We begin to understand what men live by and what they die for. And we see into that mysterious world of the emotions and the subconscious mind. External reality is touched and illuminated with flashes of color, light, and shade from our own emotional association with it. This imaginative association not only creates at once an unpragmatic, ideal relationship between ourselves and the world, but it also makes possible an extraordinarily elastic and vivid relationship between

apparently isolated phenomena in our minds. Consequently we should sharpen our perceptions to catch delicate shades of meaning, to discern the ways in which literature can broaden our comprehension by all the subtlety of allusion and suggestion. In other words, as Meredith said in justifying his method in *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, we must "feel the winds of March when they do not blow." These winds we will feel when we understand that there is importance in what we might before have regarded as only vagrant and elusive impression.

When we have begun to perceive form and purpose in the world, when we understand the nature of objective experience and the character of the inner life, we find ourselves, hardly realizing it, in the domain of spirit. Many times this feeling of elevation comes from an emotional stimulus of extraordinary power and subtlety that stands almost alone, having little or no relationship to an assertion of values in human conduct. A moment's thought will recall a dozen poems of such force and poignancy that we feel uplifted as we read. Coleridge's "Kubla Khan," Keats's "I Stood Tiptoe upon a Little Hill," Wordsworth's "Solitary Reaper," for example, all reveal this quality. In poems of this sort we look not for idea to teach us but rather for the imagination to free us; to free us not from responsibility but from brutish insensitivity.

Elevation also comes when the author shows an ethical idea thrusting forward against pressure. Through vicarious experience the reader may strengthen his own awareness of the laws of conduct, by accepting for himself the same ethical obligation which actuates creatures of the imagination. This concept raises the author's creation and likewise the reader's response far beyond a mere apprehension of what can be felt or seen or touched; it translates them to the world of idea, that plane in which man, by

virtue of his unique nature, is most peculiarly man. It is this spiritual elevation which lies behind impassioned love poetry, in its insistence on the lover's search for purity and goodness, and which gives power to the death of the tragic hero. Always it deals with active choices on the ethical plane; always it affirms that through the force of idea we can rise above difficulties, even when they destroy us.

These three necessities—clarity, breadth of understanding, and elevation of spirit—will help to explain the general satisfaction we get from reading. They may sound somewhat formidable, and I would not like to imply that the reader must spend his time making a blueprint of his soul, for there is plenty of good common or garden enjoyment in literature. We can laugh at the world as it deserves, and we can put ourselves a thousand miles away with a galloping story. We will even find that we can digest a peck of dirt. Once we know, however, what literature can give us at its best, all that we read takes its place in an order, each work gains new meaning through comparison. At the risk of formal demarcation I have described the three satisfactions individually, though they are not mutually exclusive. They constantly flow and coalesce into one another, and in the works that have most meaning for trained readers all three qualities are woven together into a tough and beautiful fabric.

This fusion of clarity, breadth, and elevation is part of a general process which literature shares with the other arts. In fact the balancing and reconciling of forces is necessary in any kind of creation, whether one is fashioning an army or a sonnet. In making a sonnet, however, one is not giving close-order drill to men but to emotions and ideas—and they are somewhat unruly recruits.

A reconciliation and coordination of forces is unavoidable in

literature because of the duality of human experience. Man lives in two worlds. He is not simply a mechanism adjusting itself to its immediate environment, he can escape the present through memories and anticipations. This is to acknowledge the essential truism that he is a reflective as well as a practical animal. And it is just as he reconciles these two characteristics that he lives a fruitful life. The two forces, under constant strain, seek a point of repose in which one element supports and buttresses the other. Because this reconciliation is a part of life so is it reflected in literature. What we read shows just as clearly as worldly experience that we cannot live in the pragmatic "this world" to the exclusion of the speculative "other world." The two worlds are twin necessities. A perfect equipoise, of course, is not possible, or indeed even desirable. Reconciliation of forces in this case does not mean a compromise of exhaustion. One of the factors always predominates, yet without tyrannizing over the other. If it does thus tyrannize, the disproportion twists the picture out of shape. William Blake's long mystical poems, for example, do not begin to have the power of Milton's *Paradise Lost* because Blake forgets the world of men whereas Milton remembers it. Each of the worlds, then, must be clearly recognizable if literature is to achieve its greatest power.

The same reconciliation is also essential as between the opposite forces of repose and activity, or, in more familiar terms, uniformity and variety. Uniformity is the most obvious law of the universe. We do not need to wonder if the sun will rise in the morning or if the tides will ebb and flow, for these are uniform certainties. Our hearts beat in steady rhythm, and we expect our bodily organs to perform in a predictable way. We are constantly, moreover, trying to achieve a sense of permanence in the short span of our lives, and we honor, even in the breach, regular habits

of diet, sleep, and exercise. Regularity is a deep satisfaction. The savage beat of the tom-tom (used so powerfully in O'Neill's play *The Emperor Jones*), the counting-out rhymes of children, the rhythmical pound of a child's jibe—all these show a strong instinct for uniformity, for repeated experience. Hence we can understand why primitive attempts to create literature almost always take metrical form. Metre and rhyme, then, are not mere tricks by which poetry is self-consciously set apart from prose, they are not a kind of gymnasium bar on which the reader has to learn to chin himself. They represent rather the instinct for regularity which satisfies a vital human need. So also in the larger sense the form of the work as a whole must be seen not merely as a symmetrical frame, but rather as an integral part of the volition by which we try to give direction to experience.

Yet though in a sense man is an intricate machine he is certainly not a metronome. He cannot see his life run out to a dull, mechanical ticking. He needs regularity, but not monotony. As animals, we live in the physical world and can escape neither its law nor the instinct for survival which makes us regularize our habits. As men, however, we live also in the nonmaterial world, we reflect on what has been and what may be. The uniformity of our existence, then, is shot through with variations upon the central theme, with the thoughts, sensations, or actions which will give us relief from the deadly sameness of a mere survivalist existence. Without these variations, literature as a reflection of life would become mere rhetoric. Through them the author reveals the infinite variety of design in the texture of human living, the individual preferences and desires, the subtle gradations of taste, even brutal violence, and the passion that consumes both source and object, and, indeed, all the manifestations of personality that lie beyond the narrow way of life for survival.

only. All of these the author touches with fire so that our eyes may see the light and our hands may feel the warmth.

Literature, then, must reconcile diversity. Out of many materials assembled together one single object is made, the author works his substance into purposeful form. He bends refractory materials to his use in a dynamic agreement. Always he works progressively and expansively, aware of human needs, so that at the end we stand in wonder not so much at the craft which assembles, joins, and fits as at the strength which moves in our minds and hearts.

## SUBSIDIARY FORM

With some strong and leading sense of the world, the tight hold of which secures true *composition* and not mere loose accretion, the literary artist, I suppose, goes on considerably, setting joint to joint, sustained by yet restraining the productive ardour, retracing the negligence of his first sketch, repeating his steps only that he may give the reader a sense of secure and restful progress, readjusting mere assonances even, that they may soothe the reader, or at least not interrupt him on his way, and then, somewhere before the end comes, is burdened, inspired, with his conclusion, and betimes delivered of it, leaving off, not in weariness and because he finds *himself* at an end, but in all the freshness of volition.—PATER

THE LITERARY ARTIST, like every other artist, works under a dual responsibility. In the first place, he must express the power and vividness of his own experience whether actual or vicarious, in the second place, he must give this experience relevance to his readers. And it is not alone this last responsibility, this association with the social group, which underlies and makes imperative the whole question of form in literature; for while literature undeniably derives a great deal of its power from its ability to suggest ways of attaining social and spiritual accord, at the same time it achieves a unity and a synthesis in the soul of the individual artist as well. The sanative process whereby one man may arrive at the highest expression of his powers through the process of selecting, ordering, and giving expression to the mass of particulars which crowd his mind is well to remember, for literature is in the first instance an individual reaction before it becomes a social phenomenon. One cannot think of one without the other; they are indissolubly

wedded, and the union of the two aspects reveals itself clearly in the whole question of form.

Form in literature is the means by which the artist selects and develops his material so that in detail and in the whole it will reveal a single persuasive purpose. Its essence, its greatest strength is that it reveals the directive power, the faculty that objectively sits in judgment upon experience, weighing its fitness for inclusion within an artistic framework. Consequently form is a *generalized* contribution to literature, it does not reveal to us the immediacy of place and action. When properly integrated, however, and when allied to the full impact of effective language it adds an indispensable quality, namely, the sense of permanence even in the midst of change, the existence of an abiding order.

Since form represents one of the innate, permanent satisfactions of life it is not always consciously to the fore as a writer begins to compose. And it is idle to argue on this account that the form which one sees in a work is often accidental, or is simply the invention of ingenious critics. The important point to remember is not whether the author composed according to a detailed plan but whether in its final state the work reveals the form which increases its power, be this the result of largely conscious or largely unconscious effort. Tennyson, one might say, could hardly have anticipated the full measure of reconciliation with the Divine order which adds such a sense of completeness and finality to *In Memoriam*. During the years in which he was giving expression to his grief at the death of Hallam he underwent tumultuous changes of mood. How, then, could he have been following a plan toward a known end? The answer to this objection is that it matters little whether or not Tennyson was writing under formal compulsion. What does matter very much, not only in this case but in all others, is whether the author, in whatever

manner fitted his talents best, created his work so that the reader recognizes organic form. If he can find unity and cogency of detail in the extended work there is little to be gained from wondering how much the final end depended on antecedent design.

In any discussion of form the thorny question of the distinction between poetry and prose must arise. It arises because of the strongly marked formal elements of rhythm and rhyme which have always characterized poetry. Despite the fact that the dividing line between poetry and prose is a hard one to draw, especially since the emergence of free verse and polyphonic prose, despite the authority of Wordsworth in rejecting an arbitrary distinction between the two, and the weight of Walter Pater's support in his "Essay on Style," I am sure that it would be an obtuse reader who could not tell one from the other. For not only is there the difference in essence, in the greater dependency of poetry upon an individual mode of expression, upon the frequent use of ellipsis, symbolism, and suggestion through powerful sense impressions, but there is usually a quite obvious formal distinction as well. And this formal distinction, which we recognize chiefly in the use of rhythm and rhyme, is not to be dismissed lightly. For poetic form (in the sense in which I have just used the term) is a powerful link with the generalized world which the poet must represent in addition to his own experience. Cadence, rhythm, and rhyme are based on an instinctive necessity, they have their roots in deep subconscious and primitive feelings and are quite different in character from, though they add force to, the definite images of experience presented by the poet. Carl Sandburg, though certainly one of the freest of poets as regards formal structure, began his "Ten Definitions of Poetry" thus. "Poetry is a projection across silence of cadences arranged to break that silence with definite intentions of echoes, syllables, wave lengths."

The regular repetitive harmony described by Sandburg helps to lend power to poetry. Here the structure, sharply and cleanly outlined, is a satisfaction in itself; in prose the form can usually give us no such poignant surprise, one sees it more as a means to an end, and one looks for the immediate vividness of situation. The form of poetry, however, lies beyond the immediacy of the experience it helps to present.

To return to the general question of form: the author must achieve order of detail and of the whole work. This is to say that there must be subsidiary form—the congruity and logic of small units such as the sentence, the couplet, and the paragraph—and integral form, the design apprehended when the reader views the work as a complete pattern. Every sentence has a function; it must not only illuminate the immediate incident, scene, or situation, but it must also take its place in a larger design of clean and bold outline.

What, then, are the requisites of subsidiary form? The first requisite is that clarity shall be respected. In the present century this requirement has been of less importance than before. The tendency toward the use of subconscious impression in both poetry and prose, the emergence of poetry stripped to the bare bones of cryptic thought, the disillusionment which demands the rejection of the simple, the familiar, and the traditional—all these have played a large part in making the literature of our day often seem willfully oblique. In fact there seems to be a strongly marked tendency in modern writing to regard the life of man as a kind of continual nightmare of horrid irrelevancies. With all due regard for the pioneers in modern psychology I believe their literary brethren have overstated the case. Man still tries to resolve and synthesize; to act on the basis of evaluated evidence. And this being so, thoughts and impressions in literature should be trans-

lated into terms which have relevancy not only for the individual but in the sphere of common understanding as well. In simplest terms this means that the author will show in his sentences and paragraphs the *ordering* of experience and not merely experience itself. His work should represent the purification and distillation of the raw materials into something which has not only subjective force but objective reality as well.

Probably the most important general consideration in dealing with the question of form is the sense of continuity which should appear in any well-composed work. This continuity is *directive* in nature, it is purposeful, it is extra-individual. That is to say, it presupposes a framework of logical thought. While the author can now and again lapse into the dramatic portrayal of sensation or action to achieve the effect of an aimless life, he will use this method consistently only at peril of conjuring up acrid and fruitless fantasies, fantasies which but dimly satisfy our legitimate desire to know what makes man move from one point to another in the world either of space or idea. In this whole matter the smaller units of style can be a safeguard. They can present a complete and cogent idea (not merely an objectified impression or sensation), logically linked to the units which surround it.

Besides the cogency and congruity of idea within the small unit, besides the value of objective explanation as a means of giving structural force, the author will make use of various technical devices to strengthen the idea of continuity in any passage. Repetition is an indispensable instrument. It can be used to emphasize the important words by the simple device of alliteration, or to give force to central propositions by restatement in the same terms, or by balance and antithesis. Notice for example how repetitive devices characterize this passage from Thomas Wolfe's *Look Homeward Angel*:

What things will come again? O Spring, the cruellest and fairest of seasons, will come again. And the strange and buried men will come again, in flower and leaf the strange and buried men will come again, and death and the dust will never come again, for death and the dust will die. And Ben will come again, he will not die again, in flower and leaf, in wind and music far, he will come back again.\*

Here Wolfe very pointedly emphasizes his elegiac reflections on the death of Ben Gant by simple repetitive devices. Notice that the words "come again" occur no less than seven times in this short passage, notice also the almost fugal construction, the announcement and recapitulation of theme, the harmonic development of phrase by careful repetition, the restatement, for example, of all but one of the assertions of return, the alliterative reminder in "death and dust will die." The effect of these devices, when allied to Wolfe's strong feeling, is to impress the reader with a compact idea of great force.

In addition to this sort of conscious repetition, we may find a definite statement of series in sentence or paragraph, unified not only in structure but in logical purpose. Bacon, for example, in his essay "Of Marriage and Single Life" writes "Wives are young men's mistresses, companions for middle age, and old men's nurses." In *The Battle of the Books*, Swift, in a passage of magnificent irony, employs the cumulative effect of the series. The Goddess Criticism, after being exhorted by Momus to lend her aid to the embattled modern authors, justifies her existence.

"'Tis I," (said she) "who give wisdom to infants and idiots; by me, children grow wiser than their parents, by me, beaux become politicians, and school-boys judges of philosophy, by me, sophisters debate, and conclude upon the depths of knowledge, and coffeehouse wits, instinct by me, can correct an author's style, and display his minutest

\* Thomas Wolfe, *Look Homeward Angel* (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929) Reprinted by permission of the publishers.

errors, without understanding a syllable of his matter, or his language  
By me, striplings spend their judgment, as they do their estate, before  
it comes into their hands. 'Tis I who have deposed wit and knowledge  
from their empire over poetry, and advanced myself in their stead."

Here the repetition of the "by me" clauses in the series, the recurrence at the end of the "'Tis I who" which began the selection are steps in fashioning a very hard-hitting paragraph. Note also how the sense of closely allied experiences, first expressed figuratively and then reflectively, gives structure to the following selection from Stevenson's *Aes Triplex*

We live the time that a match flickers; we pop the cork of a ginger-beer bottle, and the earthquake swallows us on the instant. Is it not odd, is it not incongruous, is it not, in the highest sense of human speech, incredible, that we should think so highly of the ginger-beer and regard so little the devouring earthquake? "The love of Life" and "The fear of Death" are two famous phrases that grow harder to understand the more we think about them.

The sense of climax in sentence or paragraph is an indispensable element of continuity. This rounding out of the form by punctuation of the underlying idea characterizes all the examples I have cited. Often this emphasis can be achieved by skillful contrast. In a familiar passage from the third chapter of his *History of England* Macaulay is summarizing his discussion of English naval officers in the year 1685 "There were gentlemen and there were seamen in the navy of Charles the Second. But the seamen were not gentlemen, and the gentlemen were not seamen."

George Bernard Shaw, whose sense of style, like Swift's, is a keen-edged blade, constantly makes use of antithesis and contrast for emphasis. Notice the snap of the whip, the climactic finality of the closing sentence in this short passage taken from the preface to *Three Plays for Puritans*. Shaw speaks out against the

mock-modesty of certain writers: "I leave the delicacies of retirement to those who are gentlemen first and literary workmen afterwards. The cart and trumpet for me."

Apart from the matter of unity of thought and of certain stylistic devices, both of which are essential in giving the effect of continuity, there is another element, less easy to define and analyze, which plays an important part. The rhythm of prose is clearly not the rhythm of poetry, yet in its own way it is just as effective. Since, however, it is not generally characterized by clearly accented units within the sentence (although this may happen occasionally), it is usually shown in a larger, more surgent form. This is to say that there is, and should be, in prose, a sense of rise and fall, of recurring structural and ideal patterns. Yet it must never be as completely predictable as is the form of poetry. It must retain the fluidity of ocean waves responding to the force of impulses which are alike yet never quite the same. This sense of rise and fall, the basic unity plus the quality of variation, marks the difference between dull or competent prose and prose which moves. The passage I have already quoted from Wolfe's *Look Homeward Angel* is strongly marked with surgent feeling. Notice that the last sentence—"And Ben will come again, he will not die again, in flower and leaf, in wind and music far, he will come back again"—which can be scanned in almost completely regular iambic feet, has a sense of larger movement as well. The wave breaks with "Ben will come again," it recoils with the diminuendo prophecy "he will not die again"; and again through the rest of the sentence the waters gather themselves together and come crashing down—"he will come back again."

This fluidity of prose movement is dependent to a large extent upon the use of contrast. The structure of the sentence may be altered in a successive series: Swift, after introducing three state-

ments with the phrase "by me," changes the structure to "and coffeehouse wits, instinct by me", or the sentences may be varied in kind, from declarative to interrogative, as in Wolfe and Stevenson, or in length, as in the terse and epigrammatic conclusion to the passage from Shaw. Whatever the means employed, however, there must still be the fundamental sense of continuity; but, to recur to my original figure, it will be the continuity, the restless and yet undeviatingly directional ebb and flow, rise and fall of the waves of the sea. So again in the internal form of prose do we meet the necessary and seemingly paradoxical compromise between the forces of rest and the forces of motion, between regularity and variety.

In poetry the continuity of internal form is sharpened by the use of metre and rhyme. Thus in one sense the structure of poetry is more easy to observe. In another sense, however, it can be much more difficult, for poetry customarily goes to different levels of experience than prose. That is, it constantly makes use not only of simple declaration or narration or logical analysis but also of the whole field of the individual's thoughts and emotions, and of relationships beyond the realm of everyday experience. It takes more for granted than prose, and establishes itself quickly on reflective or sensational levels by the use of ellipsis, figurative language, and all the apparatus of suggestion. This being so, the problem of form in poetry, especially integral form where we are not concerned with the obvious regularities of metre and rhyme, is generally a more difficult one than in prose, for in poetry one is dealing with a somewhat capricious and intractable material. And it is when we see how this intractable stuff of emotional response has been related to some frame of reference that we realize how the problem of form has been solved. First, however, of the internal structure.

Earlier in this chapter I have spoken of the general justification for metrical form, its satisfaction of a deep instinctive need for repeated and ordered experience. The use of metre, and even more of rhyme, is proof of the recollective satisfaction; the reader savors stressed syllables and rhymes because they remind him of impressions he has received earlier in the poem. In the delight of recognition, relationships between scenes and ideas are established which become firmly fixed by physical similarity. More than this metre and rhyme constantly imply a continuing development; the reader therefore not only recognizes in each line some element of the familiar but he also looks forward in anticipation to the growth of the whole structure.

This question of forward movement is affected by the degrees of rigidity in poetic form. Some kinds of poetry, the heroic couplet, blank verse, the sonnet, the Spenserian stanza, for example, are standardized in structure, and tend to move at a formal, regular pace. Others such as the ode, free verse, and the elastic lyric measures leave much more freedom to the individual poet. Even within the regular measures, however, striking variations are possible. Compare, for example, the two following passages, both of which are written in the heroic couplet (two lines of rhymed iambic pentameter). In the first Pope is describing Windsor Forest, in his poem of the same name.

There, interspers'd in lawns and opening glades,  
Thin trees arise that shun each other's shades.  
Here in full light the russet plains extend.  
There wrapt in clouds the bluish hills ascend.  
Ev'n the wild heath displays her purple dyes,  
And 'midst the desert fruitful fields arise,  
That crown'd with tufted trees and springing corn,  
Like verdant isles, the sable waste adorn.

Now observe how Keats uses the same measure to describe the forest in *Endymion*.

Paths there were many,  
Winding through palmy fern, and rushes fenny,  
And ivy banks, all leading pleasantly  
To a wide lawn, whence one could only see  
Stems thronging all around between the swell  
Of turf and slanting branches: who could tell  
The freshness of the space of heaven above,  
Edged round with dark tree-tops? through which a dove  
Would often beat its wings, and often too  
A little cloud would move across the blue.

It will be evident at once that Pope and Keats have entirely different ideas as to the use of the heroic couplet. Keats has employed the measure with an elasticity which is entirely foreign to Pope. The couplets of "Windsor Forest" are highly polished and exact in form. In fact they are so correct in structure (to accord with the "correctness" of outlook) that the form seems to swallow up the matter. In *Endymion*, however, where the more fluid sensibilities of Keats are at work upon the wonder of the external world in his search for a rarefied Beauty through all the romantic expansiveness of a mythological story, the form is supple and unobtrusive.

I quote these two passages because they illustrate an important consideration in poetic form. When metre and rhyme are observed it is of especial importance that the form should not be naked. Its function is that of the generalized directive force within and behind the work, it cannot be made to displace an aesthetic or intellectual satisfaction immediately called up by the poem. In the finest poetry we are but little conscious of form; style and matter seem to move as one body functioning in health

and strength. Sometimes, however, the structure is obtrusive because the poet has little else to offer. Edgar Lee Masters has described such a situation in "Petit, the Poet," in which a versifier blind to the life-giving sources of inspiration in his village spends his days composing polite little verses in French metres on the snows of yesterday. The poem ends:

Triplets, villanelles, rondels, rondeaus,  
Seeds in a dry pod, tick, tick, tick,  
Tick, tick, tick, what little iambics,  
While Homer and Whitman roared in the pines!

Sometimes the structure is obtrusive because the poet curbs individual feeling in the interests of correctness. The Augustan age in English literature, stretching roughly from the years 1660 to 1750, was dominated by a return to classical ideas of decorum, and by a spirit of rationalism in religion and science. The result of this attitude, as we have already observed in the selection from its archpriest in literature, Pope, was to stress the rules of conduct in art as well as life at the expense of emotion. The form of "Windsor Forest" comes to our notice obtrusively because it mirrors an essentially artificial and self-conscious way of looking at life. It is interesting to observe in this connection that when Pope wrote with considerable passion on the tragic love story of Eloisa and Abelard his heroic couplets do not seem nearly so self-conscious as those in "Windsor Forest."

Let us now examine several forms of verse to see if we can discover any correspondence between the structure itself and the effectiveness which it gives to different kinds of material. The heroic or five-footed couplet, which we have already seen in Pope and Keats, has been one of the most widely used metres. Its comfortable gait, its closely recurring rhymes make it, like its

brother the four-footed couplet, well adapted to a sustained trip over terrain whose details catch the eye. It is a good honest journeyman kind of metre, ready for swift-moving narrative or logical argument or hard-hitting satire. What one might suppose to be a minor difference between the couplet and blank verse, namely, the rhyming of two adjacent lines, actually sets them poles apart. For the rhyme, especially when it occurs in lines of unvarying length, inevitably keeps the reader aware of significant detail. For skillful use of the heroic couplet in keeping the poem underway, in maintaining a brisk and regular step it would be hard to surpass Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, especially the general Prologue, in which the pilgrims are described. The following passage, taken from the description of the monk, shows the way in which the rhyme of the couplet and its regular pace help to fix the reader's attention on successive striking details:

I saw his sleeves were purfled at the hand  
 With fur of grey, the finest in the land;  
 Also, to fasten hood beneath his chin,  
 He had of good wrought gold a curious pin  
 A love-knot in the larger end there was.  
 His head was bald and shone like any glass,  
 And smooth as one anointed was his face.  
 Fat was this lord, he stood in goodly case.  
 His bulging eyes he rolled about, and hot  
 They gleamed and red, like fire beneath a pot,  
 His boots were soft; his horse of great estate.  
 Now certainly he was a fine prelate:  
 He was not pale as some poor wasted ghost.  
 A fat swan loved he best of any roast.  
 His palfrey was as brown as is a berry.\*

\* Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, translated by J. U. Nicolson (Garden City Publishing Co., Inc., 1936). Reprinted by permission of the publishers.

The couplets here give an undeniable air of sharp punctuation, so that the elements deserving stress are consciously high-lighted.

In the four-footed couplets which follow, from Masefield's narrative poem *Reynard the Fox*, the same sinewy quality appears some five hundred years and more after Chaucer wrote. The poet is describing Major Howe, one of the group which has gathered for a fox hunt:

He was a lean, tough, liverish fellow,  
 With pale blue eyes (the whites pale yellow),  
 Moustache clipped tooth-brush wise, and jaws  
 Shaved bluish like old partridge claws.  
 When he had stripped his coat he made  
 A speckless presence for parade,  
 New pink, white cords, and glossy tops  
 New gloves, the newest thing in crops,  
 Worn with an air that well expressed  
 His sense that no one else was dressed.\*

The heroic couplet is also particularly suited to the cut and thrust of satire. Here, where exaggeration is part of the method, the formal precision and exactness of the couplet, its high degree of brilliant polish as in Dryden, Pope, and Byron, are magnificently appropriate. The closely knit structure of the thought, often achieved by the balancing of statements, the trip-hammer effect of repeated blows, is well shown in the passage from Dryden's satiric poem *MacFlecknoe* in which the poetaster Thomas Shadwell is ironically praised by his "father," Flecknoe.

Shadwell alone my perfect image bears,  
 Mature in dulness from his tender years,  
 Shadwell alone of all my sons is he

\* John Masefield, *Reynard the Fox* (New York, The Macmillan Co., 1919). Reprinted by permission of the publishers

Who stands confirmed in full stupidity.  
 The rest to some faint meaning make pretence,  
 But Shadwell never deviates into sense.  
 Some beams of wit on other souls may fall,  
 Strike through and make a lucid interval,  
 But Shadwell's genuine night admits no ray,  
 His rising fogs prevail upon the day.

Blank verse (unrhymed iambic pentameter) is very different in effect from the couplet. The omission of rhyme places the emphasis not on imperative recall of detail after detail but rather on the unhurried progression of a slowly expanding thought or situation. The form of blank verse makes it suitable, therefore, for serious and yet unhurried reflection, or for stately and solemn progress. See how this feeling of stately progress marks the conclusion of Arnold's *Sohrab and Rustum*. With this passage we leave Rustum, grieving on the sands, where he has unwittingly slain his son Sohrab, to follow the river Oxus on its age-old course to the sea.

But the majestic river floated on,  
 Out of the mist and hum of that low land,  
 Into the frosty starlight, and there moved,  
 Rejoicing, through the hushed Chorasmian waste,  
 Under the solitary moon;—he flowed  
 Right for the polar star, past Orgunjè,  
 Brimming, and bright, and large; then sands begin  
 To hem his watery march, and dam his streams,  
 And split his currents, that for many a league  
 The shorn and parcelled Oxus strains along  
 Through beds of sand and matted rushy isles—  
 Oxus, forgetting the bright speed he had  
 In his high mountain-cradle in Pamere,  
 A foiled circuitous wanderer—till at last  
 The longed-for dash of waves is heard, and wide

His luminous home of waters opens, bright  
 And tranquil, from whose floor the new-bathed stars  
 Emerge, and shine upon the Aral Sea.

I have chosen this striking description of the river Oxus to illustrate the quality of blank verse because the form itself often impresses one as a great living stream majestically winding its way along a far-flung, ancient course. It is not verse for the mountain brook, for sudden falls in spray, for nervous haste, or secret loveliness, it is verse for the grand manner, for the high disputes and soliloquies of Elizabethan tragedy. In our own day Edwin Arlington Robinson has used blank verse with uncommon skill, especially in his long Arthurian narratives. Note the quality of this passage describing Arthur's dismay at the change wrought in Merlin by the worldly Vivian:

"Men change in Brittany, Merlin," said the King,  
 And even his grief had strife to freeze again  
 A dreary smile for the transmuted seer  
 Now robed in heavy wealth of purple silk,  
 With frogs and foreign tassels. On his face, . . .  
 Lay written, for the King's remembering eyes,  
 A pathos of a lost authority  
 Long faded, and unconsciously gone;  
 And on the King's heart lay a sudden cold.\*

Here, as elsewhere, the absence of rhyme helps to establish a large conception which is developed in currents of constant powerful flow. In other words the unit of feeling is more extended in blank verse than in the couplet, where constant reminders of similarity tend to give a more staccato effect.

In the measures of lyric poetry, form plays a subtle and im-

\* Edwin Arlington Robinson, *Merlin* (New York, The Macmillan Co., 1917)  
 Reprinted by permission of the publishers.

portant part. Here the poet varies his metrical devices according to the effect he wishes to secure. The possible varieties of structure are limited only by the poet's purpose and by his sense of correct emotional accent. Consequently he will vary the rhyme, the metrical foot, and the length of the line in accordance with the rise and fall of the emotion. In the following stanza, the first of John Donne's "Canonization," the subsidiary form accords with the tides of feeling:

For God's sake hold your tongue, and let me love,  
Or chide my palsy, or my gout,  
My five gray hairs, or ruined fortune flout,  
With wealth your state, your mind with arts improve,  
Take you a course, get you a place,  
Observe his honor, or his grace,  
Or the king's real, or his stampēd face  
Contemplate, what you will, approve,  
So you will let me love.

Notice that although the rhyme scheme is supple and varied the last line returns to the words which gave force to the opening line. Here is an elastic form, yet never so elastic that it ignores the sense of emphatic conclusion. Observe also the force Donne gives to the fifth line—"Take you a course, get you a place"—by using trochaic feet rather than the customary iambic. Here one gets the full weight of the rhetorical imperative by the hammer blow of command in the first syllable. Finally, the lines are varied in length to express the stages of urgency in feeling. There is a real sense of movement here, of a growing before one's eyes, and of a desperate human importance to the whole outcry, nowhere so subtly suggested as in the short line of resolution—"So you will let me love"—coming after the longer lines of expostulation. Here form and mood are happily mated.

In certain lyrics, where the feeling is of a gentle, reflective kind, the form takes on a more regular pattern. Among many other lyric poets Burns often made use of the ballad metre. This form, written in successive lines of four and three feet and in quatrains with the second and fourth lines rhymed, can well express the rather naïve and thoughtful wonder of love. In the following stanza one finds the respect of the unsophisticated for correct form, fortunately in this case a form that allows the feeling to mount by slow degrees.

O my luve is like a red, red rose,  
That's newly sprung in June,  
O my luve is like the melodie  
That's sweetly played in tune.

Here clarity and candor, a simple forward movement, regular without monotony, keep the tone of unworldly devotion constantly in our ears.

In the sonnet, lyric poetry reaches its highest level of thought. For here there is not only a powerful emotion to serve as stimulus but also a strongly marked rational faculty giving order to the idea and resolving it in general terms. The form of the sonnet is an important instrument in the effect to be achieved, for the regularity of structure makes imperative an extraordinary care in selecting and developing the material. First a word as to structure. All sonnets are alike in that the form comprises fourteen lines of iambic pentameter verse. A difference arises, however, as regards the rhyme scheme. The Italian or Petrarchian form of the sonnet consists of two quatrains (the octave) tightly linked within themselves and with each other by rhyme, and a concluding portion of six lines (the sestet), rhymed in various ways. The English or Shakespearean form consists of three quatrains, alternately rhymed and independent of one another, and a concluding couplet.

The rhyme schemes of the Italian and English forms respectively may be represented as follows abbaabbaccdcd (cde, cde, and so on), ababcdcdefefgg. In both cases, the form provides a means for the statement of situation or proposition, and for a concluding resolution on the basis of what has gone before. In the Italian sonnet the preliminary explanation occupies the octave and the resolution the sestet, in the English sonnet the proposition is often stated in the twelve lines of the three quatrains, and the conclusion in the final couplet. The following sonnet, No. LXXXIII from Shakespeare's cycle, well illustrates the part played by structure in the English form.

That time of year thou mayst in me behold  
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang  
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,  
Bare ruin'd choirs where late the sweet birds sang  
In me thou see'st the twilight of such day  
As after sunset fadeth in the West,  
Which by and by black night doth take away,  
Death's second self, that seals up all in rest.  
In me thou sees't the glowing of such fire  
That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,  
As the death-bed whereon it must expire,  
Consumed with that which it was nourish'd by.  
This thou perceiv'st, which makes thy love more strong,  
To love that well which thou must leave ere long.

The importance of subsidiary structure in the Italian form is clearly illustrated in a well known sonnet by Edna St. Vincent Millay. Miss Millay, like Shakespeare, is writing on the dust and ashes of love:

What lips my lips have kissed, and where, and why,  
I have forgotten, and what arms have lain  
Under my head till morning; but the rain

Is full of ghosts tonight, that tap and sigh  
Upon the glass and listen for reply,  
And in my heart there stirs a quiet pain  
For unremembered lads that not again  
Will turn to me at midnight with a cry.  
Thus in the winter stands the lonely tree,  
Nor knows what birds have vanished one by one,  
Yet knows its boughs more silent than before:  
I cannot say what loves have come and gone;  
I only know that summer sang in me  
A little while, that in me sings no more.\*

Of all the lyric forms the sonnet is perhaps the most deeply moving. Not a little of its power can probably be attributed to the fact that its structure, rigidly limited to fourteen lines and to a prescribed rhyme pattern, puts a heavy premium on the poet's ability to distill deep emotion and thought into very brief compass. Here, more than elsewhere, thought is patiently yet unhesitatingly made to fit within a form, and the individual units of thought in turn become part of a definite, logical scheme. And yet, paradoxically enough, in the greatest sonnets a kind of miracle has happened: the poet confines himself within a rigid form without our being aware of it. This sense of complete harmony between means and idea is unquestionably caused in part by the structure of the sonnet, which either in the more forward-moving English form or the more circular and internally enmeshed Italian, is a sensitive instrument for the slow involutions of a single thought. In the finest sonnets, the sense of progression, of continuity, is so strong that the whole experience seems to spring into fire in an instant as one reads.

\* From *The Harp Weaver and Other Poems* (New York, Harper and Brothers, copyright 1922 by Edna St Vincent Millay). Reprinted by permission of Brandt and Brandt.

This continuity is the result not only of the formal rhyme scheme, not only of the generalized reflection at the end, but also of the poet's skill in linking together progressive images or ideas to add to the effect desired. So Shakespeare's three quatrains not only serve to develop the thought without hysterical haste, they also provide an effective contrast for the reflection in the final couplet; so also does his poetic instinct light upon three different images for his three quatrains—the autumn leaves, the fall of night, and the fiery deathbed of love—all of them similar in suggestion and mood, and each of them adding force to the central idea, which is the necessity of holding to the good while still it stands before the tooth of time. Notice further how individual expressions all the way through the first twelve lines give one a sense of organic and inevitable growth, of immediate connection. The few leaves upon the boughs shake in the cold, an image which suggests to Shakespeare an incomparable metaphor calling to mind the gaunt walls of Tintern or Glastonbury, "Bare ruin'd choirs where late the sweet birds sang." This figure is perfectly in key with the fading of light in the west and the sadness of nightfall. Nightfall itself inevitably gives over to sleep ("Death's second self"), and to the vision of love consumed to ashes on its deathbed.

Miss Millay's sonnet shows the closely knit internal strength of the Italian form. She describes experience in less figurative terms than Shakespeare; in her poem personal feeling has an acute and almost unbearable impact. Here there is not the slow powerful march of the three metaphors in series, one after another in solid line; rather there is the tense circling of a tightly coiled emotion, reaching round and back upon itself in heavily duplicated rhymes and the internal ligatures of the quatrains. Then in the sestet the poet, all passion spent, reflects on her loveless days

in a sort of desperate weariness. Here the unwished relief from the ache of love is expressed in lines which wander almost wearily, almost aimlessly to the end. Yet how strong a sense of personal conviction there is in these slow-moving lines! And how strong is the unity of impression, not only in the sestet but in the whole poem! Here, as in Shakespeare, the poet secures the continuous march of feeling and thought through her skill in repetitive suggestion. She has forgotten those whom she has loved—the thought is a reproach to her—and in her sadness the rain is not a friendly, cleansing force but a bringer of ghosts, so that in her heart she feels a “quiet pain for unremembered lads.” So on to the sestet, in which a very striking and Shakespearean metaphor compares her to a tree from which in winter the birds have fled. And with the note of almost bewildered sorrow she recalls that summer once sang in her.

I have discussed these two sonnets in some detail because they seem to illustrate vividly what we will most need to discover in estimating the question of subsidiary form. They show first, the need for clear and persuasive communication, the need for congruity of part with part, and part with whole, and the need for the sense of continuity, all of which are essential to literature which pretends to push beyond factual life into idea.

## *INTEGRAL FORM*

[The author's] work now structurally complete, with all the accumulating effect of secondary shades of meaning, he finished the whole up to the just proportion of that ante-penultimate conclusion, and all becomes expressive The house he has built is rather a body he has informed —PATER

INTEGRAL FORM, or the sense for design of the whole work, depends first upon a skillful fitting together of appropriate details so as to produce a structure clean and congruent in outline. The author must have a consistent plan, he should know what kind of building he wants to erect, and he should not change his style of architecture half way through the operation. When all is done it will stand as something the reader can see with his inward eye, a result of assembling, selecting, and shaping rather than aimless accretion from one moment to the next.

In achieving integral form the author will try to give persuasive force, first to a situation or a sequence of events, second to the personality of a central figure. This central figure may stand alone or nearly so, or he may be a representative of a large social group The responsibility of the author may vary, then, from giving credibility to one brief emotional experience in the mind of a single actor to catching and transmitting the temper of a whole society.

First as to situation or story. The essential requirement here obviously is that it shall move, that it shall go from a starting point to a definite conclusion in such a way that the reader will

be compelled to follow the action. Strong supple narrative form comes about again as a result of compromise on the part of the author. He must make his picture of situation as complete as is necessary, but no more so. In other words the picture will include only dynamic details; that is, details which represent an essential link in the chain of events or in the revelation of some significant trait of character. The selective faculty of the author must create a sharpened synthesis of experience; it will not be necessary to record every step in the character's day, or to empty his mind as one might empty a bureau drawer into a packing case.

The question of what is essential, and what is not, always causes disagreement among readers. A person who trains himself, however, to keep the purpose of the work clear in his mind will be able to see the difference between mere accretion and orderly selection. It is the difference between moving forward with a full confident step and darting about on what Samuel Butler called "snipe-like flights." To be sure, in the forward step a minute detail of action or description may serve a real need. Consider the following passage from Sinclair Lewis's *Arrowsmith*, in which the author describes the activities of Dr. Almus Pickerbaugh, guardian of Public Health in Nautilus, Iowa:

While he considered the headlines in the scrap book, Martin realized that Dr. Pickerbaugh was vastly better known than he had realized. He was exposed as the founder of the first Rotary Club in Iowa; superintendent of the Jonathan Edwards Congregational Sunday School of Nautilus; president of the Moccasin Ski and Hiking Club, of the West Side Bowling Club, and the 1912 Bull Moose and Roosevelt Club; organizer and cheer-leader of a Joint Picnic of the Woodmen, Moose, Elks, Masons, Oddfellows, Turnverein, Knights of Columbus, B'nai B'rith, and the Y.M.C.A.; and winner of the prizes both for reciting the largest number of Biblical texts and for dancing the

best Irish jig at the Harvest Moon Soiree of the Jonathan Edwards Bible Class for the Grown-ups \*

Here we would not like Lewis to prune down. Every fraternal order, every "good work" helps to create not only a picture of a very real man but also to give a satiric background to Arrowsmith's fight to be the kind of doctor his training told him he should be. The detail here is positive and directive.

In Melville's *Moby Dick*, on the other hand, the detail often seems undirective. Captain Ahab's soliloquy on his pipe, for example, his heavy-handed metaphysical realization that it no longer soothes, seems a particularly pointless and feeble device in revealing the character of a man who is shown later in grim Satanic determination baptizing the lance in the name of the devil. And a good deal of the natural history of the whale which Melville introduces falls on us like a dead weight. Yet there are passages in which the grandeur of Melville's idea and his emotional force give dynamic direction to detail that might otherwise be thought superfluous. The chapter called "The Prairie" is a case in point. After describing the outer appearance of the whale's head, in highly imaginative terms, he says. ". . . gazing on it, in that full front view, you feel the Deity and the dread powers more forcibly than in beholding any other object in living nature" Here the physical detail serves to stir our awe and wonder, and we are prepared to accept Melville's concept of the white whale as not merely a malignant sea beast to be destroyed but also as some mysterious and obstructive superhuman force. To be effective, then, detail must not stand alone, it must not be used to satisfy merely a roving eye, or to provide a technical "complete-

\* Sinclair Lewis, *Arrowsmith* (New York, Harcourt, Brace and Co., Inc., 1925) Reprinted by permission of the publishers.

ness." It must rather have a clear purpose outside itself to which the reader in his forward progress will be able to refer.

The principle of continuity behind all form makes it necessary that the various elements in the story hold together convincingly. This is not to say that the author must be enslaved by the old unities of Time, Place, and Action, but rather that he will not reject them capriciously. The story should represent an orderly and credible progression. This is particularly easy, of course, when the narrative itself is the main thing, when exciting events crowd one after the other. A moment's thought will bring many examples to mind: the "Leatherstocking" tales of James Fenimore Cooper, Stevenson's stories of romantic adventure, and in our own day the novels of Kenneth Roberts and Ernest Hemingway. The first part of Roberts's *Northwest Passage*, for example, describing the expedition of Rogers's Rangers against the St. Francis Indians, is superb narrative writing. And it depends for its effect not only on violent and heroic adventure but also on the author's skill in selecting purposeful details and in constantly making us aware that men are on the march. All of the authors I have named above have this faculty of showing us the swift and orderly movement which is one of the most important elements in good narrative.

Not all narratives, however, are so simple in design as Roberts's account of the St. Francis expedition. The author will often wish to leap backward in time to describe previous situations either through objective commentary or through the reflections of an actor in the story, as J. P. Marquand has successfully done in *So Little Time*, when he describes the adolescent yesterdays of Jeffrey Wilson and Louella Barnes. Or he may wish to keep two or more complete lines of action going simultaneously, sometimes tightly interwoven, sometimes loosely connected if at all.

The important point to remember here is the author's responsibility to persuade through credible progression. The general frame of time, or a significant similarity of situation, should be preserved so that the reader is aware of the binding together of large segments of experience.

Narrative continuity is more difficult to maintain when the author stresses not so much the excitement of events as the solution of an emotional or spiritual problem. Here perplexities in solving the problem often come so much to the fore that tightly knit sequence seems of little importance. Joseph Conrad, with his ruminative wonder about the behavior of men, his habit of walking reflectively about a situation, his questioning "traveller's eye-view," as Aldous Huxley called it, often puts his stories together confusingly. In *Lord Jim*, for example, the reader is definitely puzzled by the elliptical manner in at least the first part of the book. We gather that Jim, a ship's officer, has been guilty of cowardice or irresponsibility in abandoning the apparently sinking *Patna*, and that he has to endure the sentence of the court of enquiry alone when all his fellow officers skip out. All of this we eventually sort out in our minds, yet it is not always an easy task, for the story is told by a ruminative narrator, Marlow, who cannot manage to make completely straightforward, for example, even such an elementary detail as the cause of the accident to the *Patna*. Consequently we see a good deal of the early part of the story in a confusing half light. Here, however, the obliqueness of the narrative is largely forgiven because the central character himself is vividly revealed.

Aldous Huxley's *Eyeless in Gaza* represents an even more willful and violent distortion of continuity than *Lord Jim*. For while in Conrad there is always the excuse of a narrator, who at least is reconstructing the episode and who may be charged with the aim-

lessness and digressiveness of many a storyteller, in Huxley there is no improvising narrator to shoulder the blame when the author wanders. In the one case the vagaries can be laid to a sensitive improviser; in the other they are the author's own responsibility. This is how Huxley arranges the time scheme of the first seven chapters of *Eyeless in Gaza*: Chapter I describes the erotic Mary Amberley and her daughter Helen Ledwidge on August 30, 1933. The author then jumps to April 4, 1934, and takes one inside the consciousness of the hero Anthony Beavis, who is toying with the idea of pacifism as a solution to the uneasiness implied in his condemnatory *video meliora proboque, deteriora sequor*. In Chapter III (August 30, 1933) we see Anthony and Helen sunning themselves on the Riviera. Then there is a great leap backward in time to November 6, 1902, when Anthony and his father are shown on the way to the mother's funeral. Following this chapter is a scene in a butchershop on December 8, 1926, when Helen and Joyce Amberley react fastidiously to the purchase of viscera. We then return to Anthony Beavis's boyhood and see him at school on November 6, 1902. Finally we read an extract from his diary of April 8, 1934. And so it goes through the whole course of the novel. The effect of this arrangement, especially since there is no attempt to bridge the gaps by explanation, is to compel the reader to spend his time in trifling detective work. Here the progressive narrative movement has all but disappeared.

Selection and integration in constructing a story assumes that the narrative is moving toward some preconceived goal, toward some final punctuation. The reader should get the sense of events culminating in a consistent resolution. No matter what the scope of action, whether the incidents occupy only an hour or so or a whole lifetime or several generations, there should be a point of climactic tension followed by a sense of release and completion.

This whole aesthetic requirement is a reflection of universal, everyday conduct. Uncounted times during his life the individual passes through a cycle: initial problem presented, reflection upon various possibilities, a scheme for solution put to work, and the winding-up of the whole affair. As the probable result of certain considered steps, this final dismissal is a desirable end, for it marks the accumulation of power and wisdom through a conscious effort to realize one's capacities. A successful conclusion of this kind, either in life or in literature, gives us that clean, strong satisfaction we get when the well-trained chorus ends a Bach chorale and with one united impulse releases the final note.

If this ultimate emphasis is to be reached the author must have realized the importance not only of action but also of resolution of action. In his greatest tragedies Shakespeare progresses through incident to the finality of decision with great mastery of form. His plays build up an overpowering sense of tragic concentration. The hand of doom rests on the characters from the start. This feeling of the constriction of events within the limits of inevitable catastrophe gives tragically ironic power to the story of the star-crossed lovers and the Moor of Venice. *Othello* is a masterpiece of construction. The action is confined within narrow limits of time and almost equally restricted space, and the play deals with that most intimate of all relationships, the bond between husband and wife. Every step hastens the sinister revenge which Iago has planned for his hated rival, and even if, like Dr. Johnson, we may be appalled at the horror (and even the improbability) of the situation we cannot fail to be impressed by Shakespeare's skill in making the story mount to a gruesome catastrophe.

Compare *Othello* in this respect with Webster's *Duchess of Malfi*. Here is another "domestic tragedy," the story of the

beautiful Duchess who was destroyed through the dark plots of her brothers because she had married her steward, Antonio. It is a strange and brilliant play. Evil hangs over it like a sulphurous cloud, and there are occasional passages which in their somber power might have been written by Shakespeare himself. Yet the total effect we receive is not so simple, not so overpowering as in *Othello* or *Romeo and Juliet* or *Hamlet*. I believe that the reason lies in Webster's neglect of form. There are great gaps both of time and action which make the play not only confusing to read but also intermittent in its power. Scene follows scene often with no clear connection either temporally or logically, so that the plottings of the two brothers seem uncommonly erratic, and even the relationship of the Duchess and Antonio lacks clarity and force. Most damaging of all, Webster has weakened the impact of the catastrophe by an unusually long resolution. The Duchess is murdered at the end of the fourth act, leaving the play to limp on through an enervating fifth act wherein the brothers receive the punishment they deserve. The effect of all this casual treatment of the form—the careless joining of the scenes, the lapses in time, the anticlimactic aftermath of the Duchess's death—is that the reader inevitably finds himself distracted from the dramatic force of the play, which is the portrayal of limpid innocence ensnared in a diabolical plot. If a narrative, therefore, is to be clear in outline and single in effect there must be a strong accentuation of the end toward which all the action has tended.

The author also achieves integral form when he gives us a convincing picture of a single personality or one aspect of it. This personality most clearly furnishes the outline, naturally, in auto-biographical or biographical writing. At first glance one would suppose that Boswell's *Life of Johnson* was a particularly casual stringing together of anecdotes and opinions, so loosely integrated

that the work showed less *form* than conscientious accumulation. Yet out of the mass of material gathered by the persistent sycophant there does emerge a picture of one personality which is so complete and so striking, that the anecdotal, disjointed form is forgotten and we think instead only of that amazingly rich and yet single individual. So also for the reader rather than the theologian the power in Newman's *Apologia pro Vita Sua* lies not so much in the steps by which he came to the Roman faith as in the revelation on every page of the book of a mind singularly earnest, sensitive, and candid.

The subjective revelation of personality is a very powerful agent in giving a sense of structure to imaginative writing, or to writing in which the emotions are strongly aroused. So Wordsworth's *Prelude*, the long poem which is the spiritual autobiography of his earlier years, makes a strong single impression on the reader through the patient portrayal of a mind—a mind which realizes itself in large part through the successive stages of the relationship of the poet to Nature. One gets here a sense of design through constant and conscious growth toward spiritual maturity.

In *The Prelude* the centrality of personal exposition is obvious and intentional. It is biography and credo in one. Other works which may not be so formal and self-conscious in this regard may yet reveal equal power. I have never been able to read Tennyson's "Ulysses," for example, with its scorn of mere domestic contentment and decent conformity, its invitation to a life of perilous seeking, without feeling that this revelation of an unfamiliar Tennyson, restlessly crying out against mere security and comfort has charged the poem with energy. Likewise, throughout Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale" we feel the strong pulse of one man, one rarely endowed creature, suffering intensely and affirming triumphantly. Beyond the flux of sensation, beyond the

garden in Hampstead where Keats sat "half in love with easeful Death," beyond even the magic casements through which, as the nightingale sang, Keats saw the perilous seas, we look into the heart of the poet himself.

It is not essential, naturally, that the demands of integral form confine a character to the working out of one situation, at the end of which we see him no more. Wordsworth's *Prelude* or Tennyson's *In Memoriam* are not by nature structurally inferior to the "Ode to a Nightingale" or "Ulysses." We may see the hero engaged on not merely one problem or adventure but on half a hundred, one after the other. Some books, particularly novels of the picaresque or rogue-adventure sort, are little more than isolated episodes connected loosely by the character of the hero himself. Yet the central figure, in the picaresque novels a likable, scampish extravert, binds the whole work together into the conscious and consistent revelation of one personality at work in the world. It is only this insistence on the continuity of character, upon the amiably picturesque Uncle Toby and Corporal Trim, for example, which saves *Tristram Shandy* from gathering dust in a museum showcase of literary curiosities. It is this which lends to the narrative of *Don Quixote*, at times downright tedious, its bright connecting thread, and which, in Dickens's *David Copperfield* gives a multitude of characters their proper emphasis by relating them to David himself. So also in the novels of Thomas Wolfe the central figure (who is always Wolfe himself) provides the unity in stories of tumultuous passion and experience, through the revelation of a man insatiably curious about life and the riddle of happiness. In works of this sort, then, the author compensates for looseness of the narrative structure by developing the unity of an individual, through a variety of adventures.

In this kind of writing, society itself plays an important part

in giving the sense of structural design. For often the writer, whether for realism or satire, wishes to record the temper of a social group. So Pope in *The Rape of the Lock* gives us the self-conscious trivialities of genteel life in the age of Queen Anne, when over the teacups of ladies of quality "at every word a reputation dies", so Thackeray in *Vanity Fair* describes the opportunistic world of the Regency. So Zola reveals the squalor of miner and farmer and cocotte of his day, and Galsworthy the smug satisfaction of the English middle class.

Man and society, however, should be complementary, the one should not obscure the other. It is the failure in this respect which makes one feel that Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus* is rather a monologue than a drama. From the moment of his opening rejection of the satisfactions of learning, through his compact with Mephistophilis and the various slapstick episodes of magical tomfoolery; from his wrestlings with his inner doubts after his fatal agreement and his lyric rapture at the vision of Helen of Troy to the moment when he is carried shrieking to the pit Faustus acts alone. There is no one whom his plight affects save himself. This condition gives an artificiality to the play which keeps it from the place occupied by Shakespeare's tragedies. In *King Lear* the consequences of stubborn pride are shown with overwhelming power not only in Lear's fatal disintegration but also in the lives of his daughters, his faithful followers, and even of the kingdoms of England and France. In *Othello* and *Macbeth*, likewise, the individual conflict is set against the responsibility of a social group.

Note my emphasis on the individual, for despite the place of society in revealing the large plan of human activities it is always *a man* who is or should be the center of attention. He alone, the autonomous, responsible representative of his world, is able to give meaning and direction to society. Consequently, the indi-

vidual should not be lost in the social group. Raskolnikoff in *Crime and Punishment* is not, nor is Soames Forsyte. To me the characters of Dos Passos are. Here the dispersion of material to acquaint the reader with many aspects of contemporary life, the recitation of "case histories" (Richard Savage, Charley Anderson, and Mary French, for example), the clinical austerity of the author's dissection of society—all these combine to give Dos Passos's novels, remarkable though they are as documents and electric though they often are as narrative, a peculiarly flat quality. The electricity in them serves more for nervous stimulation than for illumination. The society of dogged liberals, of cadgers and nymphomaniacs and Wall Street wolves we may see, what we see only dimly is the real person himself. And without the real person, complete, self-knowledgeful, and directive we are living in the curious half world of the Hollow Men, a world of formless, capricious accident.

Integral form demands, as I have said, a purposeful selection and unification. It demands, moreover, a complete vigorous body rather than a clothed skeleton. I say this having in mind a good deal of the raw-boned fiction of our own day. One striking characteristic of the modern novel has been the relative disappearance of the author. He has often borrowed in effect the technique of the dramatist in presenting a series of pictures without explanatory framework and commentary. In the drama this detachment is not so troublesome because the attention is concentrated on a single situation which must be solved by people communicating with one another and making themselves understood. When we see the play on the stage the very physical presence of the actors simulating the expression of familiar emotions brings a sense of fullness to the experience. In the novel, however, and in poetry (which two forms have tended in significant ways to merge in

recent years), the characters need communicate with one another no more than they wish. That is to say that the emphasis may be predominantly on the revelation by the author of *private* emotion. Or perhaps the people may be shown reacting to one another in a perfectly simple way, going through a thousand minute activities for no clearly observable reason (since the author does not tell us why) save apparently to satisfy some innate molecular energy.

In his essay *The Irresponsibles* Archibald MacLeish has exposed the fundamental danger in this kind of writing. He compares the irresponsibility of the modern scholar and the modern writer:

Where the modern scholar escapes from the adult judgments of the mind by taking the disinterested man of science as his model, the modern writer escapes by imitation of the artist. He practices his writing as a painter does his painting. He thinks as artist—which is to say he thinks without responsibility to anything but truth of feeling. He observes as artist—which is to say that he observes with honesty and truthfulness and without comment. His devotion, as with every honest painter, is devotion to the thing observed, the actual thing, the thing without its consequences or its antecedents, naked of judgment, stripped of causes and effects. The invisible world, the intellectual world, the world of the relation of ideas, the world of judgments, of values, the world in which truth is good and lies are evil—this world has no existence to the honest artist or to the honest writer who takes the artist for his model. His duty is to strip all this away—to strip away the moral preference, the intellectual association.

He sees the world as a god sees it—without morality, without care, without judgment.\* People look like this. People act like that. He shows them looking, acting. It is not his business why they look

\* Cf. James Joyce's statement in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* "The artist, like the God of the creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails."

so, why they act so. It is enough that he should "make them happen." This is the whole test, the whole criterion, of the work of the writer-artist—to show things as they "really happen" to write with such skill, such penetration of the physical presence of the world, that the action seen, the action described, will "really happen" on his page. If he concerns himself with motive at all he concerns himself with the "real" motive, meaning the discreditable motive which the actor conceals from himself. His most searching purpose is to find, not the truth of human action, but the low-down, the discreditable explanation which excuses him from care. The suggestion that there are things in the world—ideas, conceptions, ways of thinking—which the writer-artist should defend from attack the suggestion above all that he was under obligation to defend the inherited culture, would strike him as ridiculous.\*

To all the confusion of private sensation and apparently undirected activity of the kind MacLeish describes, the author can, if he wishes, bring vitalizing fullness, through an understanding of the function of integral form. He can do this by *telling* the story rather than by allowing the story to tell itself. He can do it by assuming again his responsibility for building rather than assembling, and by recognizing that although clear, leisurely commentary and explanation are obviously regarded in some quarters as survivals of an unfortunate age before neuroses became fashionable, they have a vital artistic function. The author can reveal in his whole work, therefore, not only a continuity of development, but also the responsibility to give his conception breadth and strength by unfolding and exposing the purposes of his actors, their natures, and the qualities of experience through external commentary.

All this means that when we think of the importance of the individual and of society in the structure of literature we dis-

\* Archibald MacLeish, *The Irresponsibles* (New York, Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1940) Reprinted by permission of the publishers.

cover that integral form is more than a matter of arranging a pattern, however detailed and ingenious. There is effective form and there is ineffective form. Effective form, which tries to clarify the individual justifying himself in the world through his recognition of forces outside himself, can be differentiated from mere plan, from the scheme for the arrangement of material. In this last respect Dos Passos's novels are usually laid out with great care. *The Big Money* tells parallel stories of four important characters: Margo Dowling, a movie actress; Charley Anderson, a Middle Western flyer in the first World War who gets in on the big aviation money in New York; Mary French, whose liberalism leads her from Colorado to Vassar and to workers' organizations in New York; and Richard Ellsworth Savage, a big shot in advertising. Upon these four characters in alternation the action is concentrated, so that there is a definite scheme within which the novel unfolds. Dos Passos has aimed, moreover, to give a comprehensive unity to the book by three other devices. In frequent brief passages called "Newsreels" he introduces flashes from events of the day and snatches of popular songs, all calculated to give an insight into the nervous, predatory nineteen twenties. In sections called the "Camera Eye" he records impressionistic subjective reactions to the world in which his people live. Nine other interpolated passages tell the stories of public figures of the twentieth century. Henry Ford, Thorstein Veblen, Rudolph Valentino, the Wright brothers, and Samuel Insull, for example. Altogether, the plan of *The Big Money* is worked out with great ingenuity.

Yet though there is a clear plan, I am not convinced that Dos Passos has given us the *form* which helps to persuade and move the reader. For his picture is of a society in which the individual is treated analytically and dramatically as a biological specimen.

The law of life for him is a constant and unproductive activity. Under the plan one sees society in naked realism, one sees the various individuals, busy as ants on their separate anthills, scarcely at all. That this social view was Dos Passos's intention I think there can be no doubt, and I would not deny that he has written very vividly. An analysis of his structure, however, the peculiar flat impersonality of his "dramatic" presentation, the isolated strands of action, the interruptive force of the interpolated sections and the constant emphasis upon a social order rather than the individual will suggest reasons why he is not a truly great novelist.

James Joyce's *Ulysses* will also serve to show that an elaborate and detailed plan does not necessarily give the deep sense of integral form. For while in Dos Passos the individual is lost in society in Joyce society is lost in the individual. As in *The Big Money*, the structure of *Ulysses* is very ingenious. The novel tells the story of twenty-four hours in the life of Leopold Bloom, a Jewish solicitor of advertising who lives in Dublin. With infinite detail it follows Bloom on various adventures through the city. In all his activities, in his relations with the tormented young author Stephen Dedalus, and with his wife Molly, and all the other people he meets or sees in passing, the emphasis is on an almost scientific dissection of the dreamlike quality of inner experience. The structure is extraordinarily elaborate, yet with care every detail of action and situation can be pieced together by a joining of scattered parts. The puzzle can be assembled. More than this, the story has a structural unity imposed on it from without. For Bloom is a modern Ulysses, and the story of his adventures in Dublin follows with elaborate ingenuity the wanderings of Odysseus, even to the adventure with Polyphemus, the brutishness of Circe's court and the final routing of Penelope's

suitors. It would be impossible in a few words to give any adequate idea of the subtle complexity of plot and the baffling inwardness of this amazing book, not to mention the mystifying way in which Joyce expresses himself the coined words, the uncompleted sentences, the violent leaps from one subject to another. The point I wish to make at the moment is that there is a plan of the whole which can be recognized.

What of the total effect on the reader, however? The effect on this reader at least, and I believe on many others, is not merely one of bewilderment, but more than that, of dispassion approaching apathy. For the emphasis on private feeling and "free association" reduces the expression to such esoteric terms that the actions and problems of the characters can only dimly be seen as objective reality. Joyce does not attempt to translate emotion and instinct even into those communicable forms of reflection which always emerge in the mind of a person under stress. No one doubts that the dark involutions of the subconscious mind play a great part in arousing our emotions and directing our wills. Perhaps it will not be naïve to remember, however, that there is a *conscious* mind also, and that this conscious mind, at least in the sane, is constantly at work, interpreting the material of experience in general, communicable, and objective terms. The esoteric quality of *Ulysses*, shown not only in the welter of individual impression but also in the complete absence of objective commentary and in the bewildering lack of connection between experiences, is so troublesome that not even the parallels to the *Odyssey* are a help. The structural aid given by this device is largely a delusion. For the reader may actually never discover that Bloom is in fact paralleling the adventures of Ulysses, that in some mysterious way Stephen Dedalus as Telemachus finds his father in Bloom, and that Penelope (Molly) will be united with

her Ulysses. In fact he will hardly discover any story at all. The plan of the work is submerged by the chaos of the individual. Lewis Mumford has acutely said that *Ulysses* portrays "the dissociated mind in the disintegrated city."

My discussion of these last two novels will reemphasize the inevitable compromise which underlies integral form. The work must describe a complete action, yet it must eliminate unessential detail; while it must communicate objective reality it must also reveal the inner experience of man; while it must have as its focus the individual, the world which the individual sees about him must be described with the eyes of mankind.

Form in literature is the means by which the artist transmits the purposeful experience of man. In the largest sense its base lies in ethical awareness, and it derives its force from the dependence of all human beings upon a primary comprehension of values, envisaging clarity, breadth of understanding, and elevation of spirit. Finally, it indicates the responsibility of the individual to translate idea and impulse into fruitful action within the framework of a society of mutually interdependent members.

## *MAGNITUDE*

Does not his Soul lie enclosed in this remarkable Volume, much more truly than Pedro Garcia's did in the buried Bag of Doubloons?

—CARLYLE

THE JUDGING of the quality of literature becomes vital to us if we try to think of the author not as a mysterious disembodied force but rather as a man who wrote to satisfy needs and to resolve difficulties which are common to us all. Literature does not grow by spontaneous combustion; it is the product of men and women who made it out of their lives. They were real persons of flesh and blood who loved and worked and agonized as men have done in all ages. If we think, then, of literature as representing a continuous living force instead of something to be exhumed we will be able to see the author not as a remote, hallowed figure but as a man whom we can know as we know any of our friends. Once we come to this approach we will be able to visualize the author's world, and his range of power in terms of personal attitudes and beliefs. What is this friend of ours like? we can say. What makes us sure that he is a remarkable person?

In literature as in our direct personal experience the author who impresses us with true magnitude is a man of unusual conviction, insight, and creative will. The awe in which we hold men of letters comes probably not so much from our wonder at the mysterious process of creation by which they turn experience into art but rather at the place of honor and responsibility which they have gained as spokesmen for the highest impulses of inarticulate

men. They are gifted above all others. Shelley called poets "the unacknowledged legislators of the world." Through them poetry "enlarges the circumference of the imagination by replenishing it with thoughts of ever new delight, which have the power of attracting and assimilating to their own nature all other thoughts, and which form new intervals and interstices whose void for ever craves fresh food. Poetry strengthens the faculty which is the organ of the moral nature of man, in the same manner as exercise strengthens a limb."

The author speaks not for himself alone, he stands as a deputy for all who look toward strengthening of mind and spirit. This being so, he must understand deeply, believe firmly, and persuade eloquently. He must know his place in the world and do it honor, he must reverence man as the individual, and he must serve the society which men of good will have raised as a barrier against anarchy. He must accept the purposeful actuality of this world and our unfulfilled reachings toward the other world.

The magnitude in literature achieved by the artist thus idealized is not a matter of mere extension or size, but rather of the power with which energy is released and directed toward an aesthetic purpose. The work must vividly suggest possibilities beyond the formal frame of its substance. Willa Cather throws light upon this whole problem in a letter which explains her reason for including the isolated story of Tom Outland in her novel *The Professor's House*; how she hoped that it would bring to the Professor's cluttered, domestic world the expansive clarity which it needed. This is how she explains what she had in mind:

Just before I began the book I had seen, in Paris, an exhibition of old and modern Dutch paintings. In many of them, the scene pre-

sented was a living room warmly furnished, or a kitchen full of food and coppers. But in most of the interiors, whether drawing-room or kitchen, there was a square window, open, through which one saw the masts of ships or a stretch of gray sea. The feeling of the sea that one got through those square windows was remarkable, and gave me a sense of the fleets of Dutch ships that ply quietly on all the waters of the globe—to Java, etc.

In my book I tried to make Professor St. Peter's house rather overcrowded and stuffy with new things, American proprieties, clothes, furs, petty ambitions, quivering jealousies—until one got rather stifled. Then I wanted to open the square window and let in the fresh air that blew off the Blue Mesa, and the fine disregard of trivialities which was in Tom Outland's face and in his behaviour.\*

Magnitude appears in the extension of idea, of the power of individual personality, rather than in pretentious physical range or mere profusion. A great spirit irradiates whatever body it may inhabit. So did it shine in Agamemnon, of whom King Priam asked Helen "Now tell me who is this huge hero, this Achaian warrior so goodly and great. Of a truth there are others even taller by a head; yet did mine eyes never behold a man so beautiful nor so royal; for he is like unto one that is a king." †

The reader must so school himself in compassion and understanding and canalized emotion that at the heart of the Protean forms of literature, at the heart of an opulently pictured society or the chambers of the human consciousness he will be able to perceive the nobility of vision which alone can give the written word the highest meaning. At that moment we may say, with the reborn poet in Millay's *Renascence*,

\* This letter was written to a young student, a personal friend of Miss Cather. It first appeared in *The News Letter* of the College English Association, October, 1940, and is now reprinted by kind permission of the author

† Homer's *Iliad*, translated by Lang, Leaf and Myers (New York, The Macmillan Co.)

no dark disguise  
Can e'er hereafter hide from me  
Thy radiant identity!

Robert Frost has said that when we read a great poem we know that we have taken an "immortal wound." What enchanted sword has given us this stroke which is both bane and blessing? What is the temper of its blade and what is the keenness of its cutting edge?

Literature strikes with the greater force because it represents what men have done and what men are capable of doing. It shows their struggle to realize themselves, their attempt to coordinate the two worlds of outer and inner experience. And true grandeur in literature appears when the author reveals to us a personality which is at once deeply conscious of its own force and at the same time able to persuade us that great areas of responsibility and achievement lie within us, just as they lie within the creatures of the author's imagination.

This reconciliation may take place on a very large stage. It may, and often does, gain force from a conscious use of Time as it affects the author's mind and emotions over long periods of slowly forming convictions. The sense of recollective refreshment is especially strong in the romantic poets, who re-create beauty all the more powerfully because they recognize that it is an age-old, universal force. So Wordsworth adds great power to the song of the solitary reaper by suggesting that she sang of "Old unhappy far-off things, and battles long ago"; and Keats crystallizes the aesthetic perfection of the Grecian Urn by calling it the "foster child of silence and slow time." In passages of this sort the uncounted years are powerful allies.

Powerful also are the forces which direct a society or a nation toward the end of noble living. The author who uses these forces sees man in relation to a full and active world, to broad and

variegated social phenomena. Epic and heroic literature show this quality especially; for here dignity and courage run like a living stream through a rugged land of high adventure.

In literature of this sort it is not so much the individual who moves us deeply as it is the high purpose which invigorates a large field of action. The battles on the "plains of windy Troy" are a part of a whole philosophy of life, of a vast world in which mortals and gods play their roles. And Beowulf is the representation of a primitive Germanic society, darkly superstitious, ruggedly masculine, fanatically loyal, and brave beyond our comprehension. This we see inevitably if we look for it, we see it in the rough but lavish hospitality in Hrothgar's hall, in Beowulf's answer after Unferth had taunted him on the swimming match with Breca, in his superhuman combats with Grendel and his dam, in the final battle against the fire-dragon, in the strong sense of personal honor and loyalty throughout the poem. And so, at the end, after Beowulf has been slain in his battle against the dragon it is not only to do him honor but also to be true to their *mores* that the nobles pay tribute to the fallen leader at his funeral pyre. In this passage, courage of action is illuminated by depth of social conscience.

Then about that barrow the battle-keen iode,  
atheling-born, a band of twelve,  
lament to make, to mourn their king,  
chant their dirge, and their chieftain honoi.  
They praised his earlship, his acts of prowess  
worthily witnessed: and well it is  
that men their master-friend mightily laud,  
heartily love, when hence he goes  
from life in the body forlorn away.\*

\* *The Oldest English Epic*, translated by F. B. Gummere (New York, The Macmillan Co., 1909). Reprinted by permission of the publishers

So also the whole pageant of medieval chivalry as we see it in Malory's *Morte Darthur*, the adventuring of knights by the way, fighting all whom they encounter and giving their help to ladies in distress, all the splendor of tournaments, and the consecration of quest for the Holy Grail gives us not only King Arthur himself, or Launcelot, or Tristram, but also the picture of a social faith in action. It is this faith which gives deep meaning to Sir Ector's noble lament for Launcelot .

"Ah Launcelot," he said, "thou were head of all Christian knights, and now I dare say . . . that thou were never matched of earthly knight's hand. And thou were the courteoust knight that ever bare shield. And thou were the truest friend to thy lover that ever bestrad horse. And thou were the truest lover of a sinful man that ever loved woman. And thou were the kindest man that ever struck with sword. And thou were the goodliest person that ever came among press of knights. And thou was the meekest man and the gentlest that ever ate in hall among ladies. And thou were the sternest knight to thy mortal foe that ever put spear in the rest."

This sense of elevation, of grandeur in literature often emerges in works which attempt to give us adventure primarily on the ethical plane. Here the author can add immeasurably to his didactic power either by suggesting the vast scope of familiar experience as shot through with intense conviction, or by describing an unimagined cosmos. Dante's *Divine Comedy*, especially the *Inferno*, where the successive circles of punishment are revealed to the poet by his guide Virgil, is crowded with the material of Dante's own world. It is true that mythical figures people his hell, but the princes and prelates of his Italy also stand before our eyes:

Such pain as there would be if, between July and September, from the hospitals of Valdichiana and of Maremma and of Sardinia the sick

should all be in one ditch together, such was there here. . . I do not think it was a greater sorrow to see the whole people in Egina sick, when the air was so full of pestilence that the animals; even to the little worm, all fell dead.

As always in the greatest literature, depth of insight rather than profusion of detail provides the key. Earlier, Dante's grief had impelled him to reveal yet more, but the consciousness of his ethical purpose restrained him: "I curb my genius more than I am wont, that it may not run unless virtue guide it." \*

So does the virtue of the poet guide Milton in *Paradise Lost*, and so likewise does Milton make his poem an incredibly rich picture of the spiritual kingdom in which man can move. The scale is vast, the whole of the Ptolemaic universe spreads out before one's eyes. Notice how in the following passage the awesome expanse of creation helps to lend uncommon weight and dignity to the problem of temptation and sin. Satan has left hell on his mission to accomplish the fall of man, and, passing through Chaos, comes into sight of Earth and Heaven.

So he with difficulty and labor hard  
Moved on, with difficulty and labor he,  
But he once past, soon after when man fell,  
Strange alteration! Sin and Death amain  
Following his track, such was the will of Heaven,  
Paved after him a broad and beaten way  
Over the dark abyss, whose boiling gulf  
Tamely endured a bridge of wondrous length  
From Hell continued reaching th' utmost orb  
Of this frail world, by which the Spirits perverse  
With easy intercourse pass to and fro  
To tempt or punish mortals, except whom

\* Dante's *Divine Comedy*, translated by Charles Eliot Norton (Boston, Houghton Mifflin Co., 1920). Reprinted by permission of the publishers

God and good Angels guard by special grace  
 But now at last the sacred influence . . .  
 Of light appears, and from the walls of Heaven  
 Shoots far into the bosom of dim Night  
 A glimmering dawn, here Nature first begins  
 Her farthest verge, and Chaos to retire  
 As from her outmost works a broken foe  
 With tumult less and with less hostile din,  
 That Satan with less toil, and now with ease  
 Wafts on the calmer wave by dubious light,  
 And like a weather-beaten vessel holds  
 Gladly the port, though shrouds and tackle torn,  
 Or in the emptier waste, resembling air,  
 Weighs his spread wings, at leisure to behold  
 Far off th' empyreal Heaven, extended wide  
 In circuit, undetermined square or round,  
 With opal towers and battlements adorned  
 Of living saphir, once his native seat,  
 And fast by hanging in a golden chain  
 This pendent world, in bigness as a star  
 Of smallest magnitude close by the moon  
 Thither full fraught with mischievous revenge,  
 Accursed, and in a cursed hour he hies.

Here and in passages of like grandeur, instinct with single-minded purpose and unmatched dignity of sound, Milton has set man's disobedience against a background which gives it the cosmic importance it deserves. Yet though the vast forces of the universe move in Milton's pages, we always return to Man, proud, enquiring Man who must win his greatness through suffering, and who should count as naught an untested, cloistered virtue.

In the novel, particularly, the author is sometimes misled into believing that mere multiplicity of detail, or picturesque scene, or exciting action will automatically give a sense of spaciousness.

None of these can do so. When united, however, with the healthy directness of Fielding, or the gentle melancholy of Thackeray, or the calm tolerance of Galsworthy such profuse picturing of life is perfectly in key with the whole purpose of the work. This conscious linking of a large purpose with wealth of material is well illustrated in explanations of their work by the three novelists I have named. The broad scope of Fielding's *Tom Jones*, suggested by the quotation from Horace on the title page, *Mores multorum hominum vidit*, is clearly indicated in several of the explanatory chapters which precede each division of the story. In the first chapter of Book 9, for example, Fielding writes: "By genius I would understand that power, or rather those powers of the mind, which are capable of penetrating into all things within our reach and knowledge, and of distinguishing their essential differences."

Having thus established the need for finding uniformity in multiplicity he discloses in the first chapter of Book 13 the variety of experience to be analyzed. He calls upon Genius to guide him:

Do thou kindly take me by the hand, and lead me through all the mazes, the winding labyrinths of nature. Initiate me into all those mysteries which profane eyes never beheld. Teach me, which to thee is no difficult task, to know mankind better than they know themselves. Remove that mist which dims the intellects of mortals, and causes them to adore men for their art, or to detect them for their cunning in deceiving others; when they are, in reality, the objects only of ridicule, for deceiving themselves. Strip off the thin disguise of wisdom from self-conceit, of plenty from avarice, and of glory from ambition. Come thou, that has inspired thy Aristophanes, thy Lucian, thy Cervantes, thy Rabelais, thy Moliere, thy Shakespear, thy Swift, thy Marivaux, fill my pages with humour; 'till mankind learn the good-nature to laugh only at the follies of others, and the humility to grieve at their own. . . . Lastly, come, Experience, long

conversant with the wise, the good, the learned, and the polite. Not with them only, but with every kind of character, from the minister at his levee, to the bailiff in his spunging-house; from the dutchess at her drum, to the landlady behind her bar. From thee only can the manners of mankind be known, to which the recluse pedant, however great his parts, or extensive his learning may be, hath ever been a stranger.

Thus, in *Tom Jones*, we find a clear and persuasive purpose behind the variety of incident, so that the richness of adventure, the whole narrative of the supposed foundling's early life in the house of Squire Allworthy, his early fling with Molly Seagrim, his infatuation for Sophia, the daughter of the hard-riding, earthy Squire Western, and all the entanglements high and low which stand in the way of the lovers before they can be united—all this is given power through a deliberate purpose largely to know and compassionately to understand.

This is the note that we must learn to recognize in literature. It is the note which Thackeray strikes in the preface to *Vanity Fair* ("Before the Curtain" he calls it). After describing metaphorically how the "Manager of the Performance" looks at the Fair and sees the hurly-burly of "eating and drinking, making love and jilting, laughing and the contrary," he goes on to distill the essence from this multiplicity.

A man with a reflective turn of mind, walking through an exhibition of this sort, will not be oppressed, I take it, by his own or other people's hilarity. An episode of humour or kindness touches and amuses him here and there,—a pretty child looking at a gingerbread stall, a pretty girl blushing whilst her lover talks to her and chooses her fairing; poor Tom Fool, yonder behind the waggon, mumbling his bone with the honest family which lives by his tumbling; but the general impression is one more melancholy than mirthful. When you come home you sit down, in a sober, contemplative, not uncharitable frame of mind, and apply yourself to your books or your business.

Here the author goes beyond the mere chronicling of events to the point of reflective interpretation.

In Galsworthy's *Forsyte Saga* one feels a surpassingly patient, accretive intelligence at work, and a constant will to analyze and clarify in terms of conduct. Here is the biographer of a class and an age. The first paragraph of Chapter VIII, Part I, of *The Man of Property* gives us the omniscient observer:

All Forsytes, as is generally admitted, have shells, like that extremely useful little animal which is made into Turkish delight, in other words, they are never seen, or if seen would not be recognised, without habitats, composed of circumstance, property, acquaintances, and wives, which seem to move along with them in their passage through a world composed of thousands of other Forsytes with their habitats.

It is these Forsytes whom Galsworthy uses to portray, as he says in the preface, the "ripeness, decline, and 'fall-off'" of the Victorian era.

"But," he continues, "this long tale is no scientific study of a period; it is rather an intimate incarnation of the disturbance that Beauty effects in the lives of men. The figure of Irene . . . is a concretion of disturbing Beauty impinging on a possessive world." Galsworthy ends his preface with the illumination of experience by penetrating purpose which we have seen before in Fielding and Thackeray.

But though the impingement of Beauty, and the claims of Freedom on a possessive world are the main prepossessions of the *Forsyte Saga*, it cannot be absolved from the charge of embalming the upper-middle class. As the old Egyptians placed around their mummies the necessities of a future existence, so I have endeavoured to lay beside the figures of Aunts Ann and Juley and Hester, of Timothy and Swithin, of Old Jolyon and James, and of their sons, that which shall guarantee them a little life hereafter, a little balm in the hurried Gilead of a dissolving "Progress." If the upper-middle class, with other classes,

is destined to "move on" into amorphism, here, pickled in these pages, it lies under glass for strollers in the wide and ill-arranged museum of Lettess. Here it rests, preserved in its own juice: The Sense of Property.\*

It is the reader's awareness of that which explains or makes meaningful a great body of experience, consciously arrived at and affirmed by a sensitive intelligence, which gives heroic stature to literature. To achieve this stature the author again must resolve a dilemma he must be powerfully moved and yet he must reflect, he must be a part of his world and yet he must rise above it. Readers of *Sartor Resartus* will remember the remarkable passage which describes Herr Teufelsdröckh's quarters in the city of Weissnichtwo. "It was the attic floor of the highest house in the Wahngasse; and might truly be called the pinnacle of Weissnichtwo, for it rose sheer up above the contiguous roofs, themselves rising from elevated ground."

From his eyrie the learned Teufelsdröckh observes the turbulent life of the city below him.

"I look down into all that wasp-nest or bee-hive," have we heard him say, "and witness their wax-laying and honey-making, and poison-brewing, and choking by sulphur. From the Palace esplanade, where music plays while Serene Highness is pleased to eat his victuals, down the low lane, where in her door-sill the aged widow, knitting for a thin livelihood, sits to feel the afternoon sun, I see it all, for, except the Schlosskirche weathercock, no biped stands so high." . . . Here, perched up in his high Wahngasse watch-tower, and, often in solitude, outwatching the Bear, it was that the indomitable Inquirer fought all his battles with Dulness and Darkness.

"Often in solitude . . . the indomitable Inquirer fought all his battles with Dulness and Darkness!" Here, with Carlyle, we

\* John Galsworthy, *The Forsyte Saga* (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1922). Reprinted by permission of the publishers.

must turn from the teeming antheap of the world to the man in that world, the thinking, feeling animal who is the center of his own universe. "My mind to me a kingdom is," said the Elizabethan poet Dyer, bringing the richness of experience within the sphere of simple meditative pleasures, scorning the artificial pursuit of place and fame. So is every man's mind his kingdom, his life a long reconciliation of desires and capacities, of action and aim, and we return once more to the individual, and his attempt through literary creation to embody his belief in himself and in the world in which he lives.

In Wordsworth's "Laodamia" we are reminded that "the Gods approve the depth, and not the tumult, of the soul." So also in the greatest literature we expect to find not mere turbulence of feeling, not the parading of picturesque idiosyncrasies in the name of "expression," but rather a translation of thought and emotion into formative elements in terms of man's personality. Let me illustrate what I mean. Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, especially the third and fourth cantos, written after the weight of public opinion had forced him to leave England, is an amazing combination of real poetical insight and theatrical claptrap. Some critics have felt that the whole poem is false at the core; that Byron is more concerned with striking dramatic poses before towering mountains than he is in giving us a humane and penetrating view of the world about him. Certainly there could be no more complete expression of the wild, unfettered, lawless individual than in the lines of the 93rd stanza of Canto III in which he describes his reaction to the storm on Lake Leman:

Most glorious night!  
Thou wert not sent for slumber! let me be  
A sharer in thy fierce and far delight,—  
A portion of the tempest and of thee!

And a few stanzas later he crystallizes all his titanic longing in an identification of himself with lightning.

Could I embody and unbosom now  
 That which is most within me,—could I wreak  
 My thoughts upon expression, and thus throw  
 Soul, heart, mind, passions, feelings, strong or weak,  
 All that I would have sought, and all I seek,  
 Bear, know, feel, and yet breathe—into *one* word,  
 And that one word were Lightning, I would speak,  
 But as it is, I live and die unheard,  
 With a most voiceless thought, sheathing it as a sword.

When Shelley exhorts the West Wind “Be thou, Spirit fierce, my spirit!” he at least envisages the Wind as a powerful agent in driving his thoughts far and wide “to quicken a new birth.” No such purposeful extension is found here in Byron. His lines reveal tumult rather than direction, an adolescent desire *to be* one of the blind elemental forces of nature rather than *to use* it. The obvious self-pity and shoddy sentimentality of the last two lines of the above stanza, moreover, especially when placed in conjunction with innumerable passages in which Byron strikes the romantic pose of the despised outcast, give the whole poem an air of self-centered irresponsibility which it is hard to overlook.

Nevertheless, Byron often strikes fire. This he does when he forgets Lord Byron for the moment. His imaginative power was great, and he was more skillful in capturing external beauty than many readers remember. The picture of the calm lake before the night storm is a vastly different kind of writing from the passages I have already quoted:

It is the hush of night, and all between  
 Thy margin and the mountains, dusk, yet clear,  
 Mellow'd and mingling, yet distinctly seen,

Save darken'd Jura, whose capt' heights appear  
Precipitously steep; and drawing near,  
There breathes a living fragrance from the shore,  
Of flowers yet fresh with childhood, on the eai  
Drops the light drip of the suspended oar,  
Or chirps the grasshopper one good-night carol more

This is writing of a high order, for it catches the very secret of our reverence for the beauty about us. Even standing alone this stanza gives us expansive and directive power. Yet it does not stand alone, for shortly thereafter Byron translates his experience

Then stirs the feeling infinite, so felt  
In solitude, where we are *least* alone,  
A truth, which through our being then doth melt,  
And purifies from self it is a tone,  
The soul and source of music, which makes known  
Eternal harmony, and sheds a charm  
Like to the fabled Cytherea's zone,  
Binding all things with beauty,—'twould disarm  
The spectre Death, had he substantial power to harm

Here the poet, though using all the power of personal conviction, is not simply fondling a private emotion. Truth, as he says, is purified from self.

In this discussion of Byron I have tried to suggest that the expression of individual feeling is a part of the greatness of literature only when it gives a picture of the author's respect for affirmative idea. Man as lightning is simply a wild, undisciplined force; as a self-pitying outcast he is the prey of paralyzing fantasies. On the other hand man who sees even the unresolved beauties of external nature finds new capacities of insight, a new awareness of the character of objective phenomena which had

not occurred to him before. Such an experience trains one to perceive the *qualities* of things, and is not to be regarded as a mere exercise in impressionism. When, as in the second stanza I have quoted from Byron, the author interprets phenomena, he strengthens our instinct for directive wisdom by affirming his belief in the permeation of the real by the ideal.

In works which depend upon the expression of the author's feeling, therefore, we must expect not merely striking sensuous impressions but also the powerful underlying awareness of an inquiring mind, a mind confident of man's desire to evaluate the various kinds of experience. This will explain the sense of elevation which lyric poetry can give us; it will explain the power of William Blake's poem "To the Evening Star":

Thou fair-haired Angel of the Evening,  
Now whilst the sun rests on the mountains, light  
Thy bright torch of love—thy radiant crown  
Put on, and smile upon our evening bed!  
Smile on our loves; and while thou drawest the  
Blue curtains of the sky, scatter thy silver dew  
On every flower that shuts its sweet eyes  
In timely sleep. Let thy West Wind sleep on  
The lake; speak silence with thy glimmering eyes  
And wash the dusk with silver.—Soon, full soon,  
Dost thou withdraw; then the wolf rages wide,  
And the lion glares through the dun forest,  
The fleeces of our flocks are covered with  
Thy sacred dew; protect them with thine influence!

The Evening Star here seems to bring beauty in its train; the twilight world is bathed in limpid, silvery light. Yet even this deceptively fragile clarity protects us from the lion and the wolf: the imagination can not only create monsters but destroy them.

With what magnificent grace and subtlety is this *coup de grace* given to melancholy fantasies in George Herbert's lyric, "Virtue!"

Sweet day, so cool, so calm, so bright,  
The bridal of the earth and sky!  
The dew shall weep thy fall to-night,  
For thou must die.

Sweet rose, whose hue, angry and brave,  
Bids the rash gazer wipe his eye,  
Thy root is ever in its grave  
And thou must die

Sweet spring, full of sweet days and roses,  
A box where sweets compacted lie,  
My music shows ye have your closes,  
And all must die.

Only a sweet and virtuous soul,  
Like seasoned timber, never gives,  
But though the whole world turn to coal,  
Then chiefly lives.

The virtuous soul, Herbert shows us, only continues to live by exerting its strength against disintegrative forces. The struggle for self-realization, the element of conflict, helps to illuminate the inner world of experience and binds us in common sympathy to the author. The conflict of loyalties—of will against inclination, of one order of life against another—helps to give strength to literature, but only when the protagonists are men of courage, insight, and conviction. It is not enough for the characters to move about in a metaphysical fog of magnanimity as in Charles Morgan's novel *The Fountain*, or to live, like Studs Lonigan, in a kind of oscillation between casual violence and futile fantasy.

The character must know his world and himself, and he must have the will to work toward a fruitful end even though he give his life for it.

Milton's Samson is a man of this heroic stature. Captured and humiliated by the Philistines—"Eyeless in Gaza, at the mill with slaves"—he sees his past as it has been, his sins rise up against him

Nothing of all these evils hath befallen me  
But justly, I myself have brought them on,  
Sole author I, sole cause.

He is the prey of black despair and of paralyzing doubt and indecision. Yet gradually he begins to sense returning power, Dalila tries in vain to reestablish her dominion, and the taunting bully Harapha slinks away crestfallen. He has seen once more what God has appointed him to do

I was no private, but a person raised,  
With strength sufficient, and command from Heaven,  
To free my country.

Finally the tumult in his mind is stilled by renewed confidence in his strength and in the might of God, so that he can leave his brethren for the fateful Philistine celebration with calm faith.

Happen what may, of me expect to hear  
Nothing dishonourable, impure, unworthy  
Our God, our Law, my nation, or myself.

At the end of the poem, after Samson's sacrifice of himself in destroying his enemies we sense the greatness of Milton's conception. In death Samson has conquered not only the Philistines but himself. As his father Manoa says:

Nothing is here for tears, nothing to wail  
Or knock the breast, no weakness, no contempt,

Dispraise, or blame, nothing but well and fair,  
And what may quiet us in a death so noble.

To be truly moving, the inner conflict must take place in a man richly endowed not only with sensitive perceptions but also with knowledge of the life about him and of himself. In the field of conduct his motives must be formative rather than dissipative, and he must try to discover and accomplish what he is ordained to do. It is this man's capacity not so much to play upon our sympathies as to win our allegiance. Pity is not enough. Rather we must for the moment become a part of his human perplexity and of his human affirmation. We must be able to share Horatio's trust when he bids farewell to the dead Hamlet:

Good-night, sweet prince;  
And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest!

The bold resolution of inner conflict works powerfully on the reader. Let us remember how Carlyle's Herr Teufelsdröckh came to some degree of peace with himself. He goes through a devastating period when, as he says, "The Everlasting No . . . pealed authoritatively through all the recesses of my Being." Life seemed a great teeming emptiness.

To me the Universe was all void of Life, of Purpose, of Volition, even of Hostility it was one huge, dead, immeasurable Steam-engine, rolling on, in its dead indifference, to grind me limb from limb. Oh the vast, gloomy, solitary Golgotha, and Mill of Death! Why was the Living banished thither companionless, conscious? Why if there is no Devil, nay, unless the Devil is your God?

In this world of "Tartarean terror" he "lived in a continual, indefinite, pining fear", until the day arrived when he could rebel against this self-imposed tyranny and assert his right to be free. But though "Legion, or the Satanic School, was now pretty well

extirpated and cast out . . . next to nothing [had been] introduced in its room," and it was not until Teufelsdröckh had passed through the "Centre of Indifference" that he was able to find a positive faith. "The Everlasting Yea" records this "glorious revolution," as Carlyle calls it, in terms of moving grandeur and elevation. There comes now the conviction that action must take the place of inaction. And out of all this unimaginable tumult of mind comes at last a wise compassion for the humanity of man, a seeking after God rather than Pleasure, and the doctrine of salvation through the work that one is appointed to do.

The God-given mandate, *Work thou in Well-doing*, lies mysteriously written, in Promethean, Prophetic Characters, in our hearts, and leaves us no rest, night or day, till it be deciphered and obeyed.

Most true is it, as a wise man teaches us, that "Doubt of any sort cannot be removed except by Action." On which ground too let him who gropes painfully in darkness or uncertain light, and prays vehemently that the dawn may ripen into day, lay this other precept well to heart, which to me was of invaluable service "*Do the Duty which lies nearest thee*," which thou knowest to be a Duty! Thy second Duty will already have become clearer.

Great literature will show us this strong confidence of man at work, and at work not merely in the physical sense of dull, mole-like activity. The activities of man should be shown as constantly shot through with an active expectation rather than a pensive wish; they should reveal the human instinct for order and beauty; they should constantly illustrate the responsibility of man to himself and to society.

This last is often very difficult to do in a period when there seems to be no underlying, unifying ethos, when we shrink in disillusionment from a world in which unity of purpose seems obscured by the smoke of battle. The authors of our own time

have reflected the moral chaos of determinism and skepticism with great vividness and sometimes with ironic fury. Strongly evident, however, is the sense, not so much even of *frustration* in life (which has at least been translated into something like metaphysical terms in Thomas Hardy), as of the complete monotony and sameness and sterility of experience. Mankind in modern literature often lives on a singularly subhuman plane, subsisting from day to day by a kind of low, animal cunning, without hope, without faith, and, one is almost tempted to say, without suffering. One remembers the despairing outcry of the savage in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, when he finds himself in a fantastic, scientific Utopia, a world which at bottom is quite as impersonal and inhuman as Hemingway's in *The Sun Also Rises* or Faulkner's in *The Wild Palms*. "I don't want comfort. I want God, I want poetry, I want real danger, I want freedom, I want good. I want sin. . . . I'm claiming the right to be unhappy." \* In the end Huxley's efficient world of laboratory babies, depression-dispelling drugs, and sexual satisfaction as easy to get as a bottle of Coca-Cola so works upon the savage that he hangs himself. And so inevitably does every man run the risk of spiritual if not physical destruction if he accepts the world as a wasteland peopled with the obscure, gibbering shadows of men.

I believe, however, that we are saying goodbye to the wasteland. Not without hope of reformation could Archibald MacLeish describe in his play *Panic* the destructive scorn and opportunism abroad among Americans even in the year 1933:

Greatness they have forgotten and pride and the envy of  
Nobler lives than their own and the service of honor.  
To suffer for no gain. to invite death in the

\* Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (New York, Harper and Brothers, 1923)  
Reprinted by permission of the publishers.

Hope only of good is a fool's fate to them.  
The man they praise is the man who has gotten away with it—  
The slave with the wise slave's tricks—the cleverest victim.  
Virtue and nobleness honor and love they laugh at! . . .  
Their speech is irony the whipped man's speech.  
They've lived a long life in the world you made them.  
They've learned well in your world. You need not fear.\*

And in the last few years, as the struggles over the world have taken their true place in a gigantic disorder of civilization, there has been no longer time for agonizing over what men must do with their hard-won peace. The sharp edge of war has cleanly divided past and present, and now we must act and we must believe if we wish to remain free.

This new clarification of issues is bound to affect literature deeply. It has already done so in innumerable occasional poems such as those in Edna St. Vincent Millay's collection, *Make Bright the Arrows*, in William Rose Benét's "Prayer for England," and in Russell W Davenport's *My Country*. It is the cause of a very significant development in Thomas Wolfe's last novel, *You Can't Go Home Again*. For in this story the hero, George Webber (who is just as surely Wolfe himself as is Eugene Gant of the earlier novels), has his eyes widely opened to the vision of Democracy after a trip to Germany. At the end of the book, in a long and stirring letter to Webber's publisher friend, Foxhall Edwards, we see a new Wolfe. No longer is he the stormy Eugene Gant, passionately eager to hold all experience in the palm of his hand, rather he is a man reaching toward a reflective idealism, respecting and understanding the bases of American society. Even though as a novel *You Can't Go Home Again* seems too much a

\* Archibald MacLeish, *Panic* (Boston, Houghton Mifflin Co., 1935). Reprinted by permission of the publishers.

stringing together of narrative and descriptive sketches and though it lacks the emotional concentration of *Look Homeward Angel*, the reader cannot close the book without feeling that Wolfe at last has said to his fellow men, "I believe "

Consider also Ernest Hemingway. Though he is still haunted by the beauty of death and violence in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, though his hero, another silent athlete, is a shade tiresome as the dominant male, this novel is incomparably the finest Hemingway has ever written, conceived and executed on a plane he has never reached before. We have always known that Hemingway could tell a story, even in spite of the failure of *To Have and Have Not*; we have always admired his ability to present a situation and to show characters in action with amazing economy of means. What we had not expected to find in him, however, was a kind of responsibility which he had never developed so fully before, a responsibility to give his story such clarity of detail and such penetration into character that scene and actors are extraordinarily convincing. His people think and act, rather than simply feel and react, as in his former stories. We get very much within Jordan's mind in a reconstruction of thoughts and feelings which comes the closest to giving the reality of "free association" of any writing I know. In addition there is a new responsibility toward mankind, a wise compassion, which lifts the whole story to a high plane. It is not so much that we *see* that amazing rock of a peasant woman, Pilar, or the Pablo of slowly ebbing strength, or the steadfast old man Anselmo, it is rather that through them and through Jordan's inner faith the whole cause of Loyalist Spain stands before our eyes. Here the individual loses himself in something far more important than eating and sleeping, or even blowing up a bridge or making love. After Jordan has been injured when his horse is hit and falls on him, he sends away the survivors of his attack

on the bridge—Pablo, Pilaf, his beloved Maria and Agustín—and waits alone on the hillside to meet the Fascist cavalry.

Stay with what you believe now [he says]. Don't get cynical. . . . Each one does what he can. You can do nothing for yourself but perhaps you can do something for another. . . . I have fought for what I believed in for a year now. If we win here we will win everywhere. The world is a fine place and worth the fighting for and I hate very much to leave it. And you had a lot of luck, he told himself, to have had such a good life.\*

Here is the authentic note of heroic insight. And as Jordan fights to remain conscious until the Fascists come within range of his gun we think again of all those who, like Ajax the son of Telamon, have prayed for light that they might see the enemy's face.

\* Ernest Hemingway, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1940) Reprinted by permission of the publishers.

## *PERSUASION*

It is in relation to these great *moral* capacities of man that the literature of power, as contradistinguished from that of knowledge, lives and has its field of action. It is concerned with what is highest in man. . . . Tragedy, romance, fairy tale, or epopee, all alike restore to man's mind the ideals of justice, of hope, of truth, of mercy, of retribution, which else (left to the support of daily life in its realities) would languish for want of sufficient illustration.—DE QUINCEY

THE TRANSFER of the aesthetic experience from author to reader demands the artist's ability not only to communicate but also to persuade; to persuade moreover at a high level. As readers, we must expect to go beyond emotional excitement to the stage of belief, to the conviction that the author has penetrated the tough shell of life to the inner core. With him we gain in wisdom.

The close communion of author and audience will depend upon the strength of the writer's feeling, upon the force with which he makes himself part of a given situation. It will depend further upon the subtlety with which he has used the imagination to give vivid freshness to our world. Finally it will depend upon the strength of his belief in man himself.

Powerful feeling must be canalized by the author as a strong propelling charge. Let us compare one verse of Dryden's "Ode to the Memory of Anne Killigrew" with a passage from Milton's "Lycidas." In this stanza Dryden majestically prophesies the resurrection of the poets at the last trump, and sees as the first of the sacred group Anne Killigrew, a talented young woman who died of small-pox at the age of 25.

When in mid-air the golden trump shall sound,  
 To raise the nations under ground,  
 When in the valley of Jehosaphat  
 The judging God shall close the book of Fate,  
 And there the last assizes keep  
 For those who wake and those who sleep;  
 When rattling bones together fly  
 From the four corners of the sky,  
 When sinews o'er the skeletons are spread,  
 Those clothed with flesh, and life inspires the dead,  
 The sacred poets first shall hear the sound,  
 And foremost from the tomb shall bound,  
 For they are covered with the lightest ground,  
 And straight, with inborn vigour, on the wing,  
 Like mounting larks, to the new morning sing  
 There thou, sweet saint, before the quire shalt go,  
 As harbinger of Heaven, the way to show,  
 The way which thou so well hast learned below

Now let us see how Milton expressed solace for the death of a gifted young person.

Weep no more, woeful shepherds, weep no more,  
 For Lycidas, your sorrow, is not dead,  
 Sunk though he be beneath the watery floor.  
 So sinks the day-star in the ocean bed,  
 And yet anon repairs his drooping head,  
 And tricks his beams, and with new-spangled ore  
 Flames in the forehead of the morning sky.  
 So Lycidas sunk low, but mounted high,  
 Through the dear might of Him that walked the waves,  
 Where, other groves and other streams along,  
 With nectar pure his oozy locks he laves,  
 And hears the unexpressive nuptial song,  
 In the blest kingdoms meek of joy and love.  
 There entertain him all the Saints above,

In solemn troops, and sweet societies,  
That sing, and singing in their glory move,  
And wipe the tears for ever from his eyes.

What are the contrasts between these two passages, and the reasons for believing that Milton has written with more enduring effect than Dryden?

In the first place one notices at once a difference in the *impetus* of the two. The contrast in mood is strongly marked. Though Milton may not have been a close personal friend of Edward King, whom he memorialized in "Lycidas," he saw in King, as Dryden did not see so clearly in Anne Killigrew, a young mind whose loss, because it was a grievous one to English life and letters, was in a strong sense a personal loss to him. Dryden's verse, though some few flashes of fire come from it, is a sonorous "occasional" piece, its tone is one of grandeur and dignity rather than lambent personal conviction. Milton's poem is a miracle of richness. Taking the conventional and artificial pastoral form he has made every line the vehicle of powerful individual feeling.

The poet who is able to achieve this effect has mastered one of the fundamental necessities in great writing: namely, the ability not only to suggest a general situation of grandeur and dignity but also to infuse it with the poignancy of strong individual feeling. This is to say that the general circumstances will be illuminated by the specific case (and vice versa), and that the picture will show an organic relationship between foreground and background. In Dryden's stanza generalities dominate to an overwhelming extent, so that a passage which might movingly reveal the apotheosis of a gifted spirit becomes instead a stately, slow-moving and unparticularized glimpse of the Last Judgment, when at the sound of the "golden trump" the dead spring to life. Yet though the host of the resurrected are led by the "sacred

poets" we cannot picture Anne Killigrew among the number who rose "like mounting larks." The passage reverberates with a stately organ music, and yet the reverberations throw back hollow echoes. The organist is playing in an empty church.

In Milton the reader is immediately and strongly aware of two things. that a man of unusual insight and subtlety is powerfully shaken by the death of a gifted acquaintance, and that it is necessary not only to keep the nobility of apotheosis before one's eyes, *but also the simple necessity of facing human sorrow*. The tone in this passage, consequently, is one of earnest persuasion and exhortation. To paraphrase Wordsworth, a man is speaking to men, is even commanding them. "Weep no more, woeful shepherds." Contrast, moreover, the triumphant affirmation in "For Lycidas, your sorrow, is not dead" with Dryden's urbane and courtly granting of precedence to Anne Killigrew: "There thou, sweet saint, before the quire shalt go." Milton is speaking almost in desperation, Dryden as coolly as if he were arranging the seats at a Lord Mayor's banquet.

Observe further the way in which Milton augments the keenness of personal feeling by recurring suggestions of sorrow: "Weep no more, woeful shepherds," and in emphatic reiteration, "Weep no more." At the close of the passage, the "solemn troops" will "wipe the tears forever from his eyes." Note also the way in which the Christian note of sacrifice and regeneration from sin appears, when Lycidas has "mounted high, through the dear might of Him that walked the waves." This suggestion of the personal salvation of every Christian believer through the immolation of Christ, which is entirely absent in Dryden's stanza, adds the element of instinctive, almost childlike faith, and reveals the unique personal kinship between man and Christ. Milton's Lycidas rises from his watery grave through a strongly per-

sonal compassion, "Through the dear might of Him that walked the waves." Dryden's Anne Killigrew would seem to rise because poets are not buried deep.

It is also evident that Milton has kept much more successfully in mind than Dryden the sense of the actual world about him. In the first place Milton states the inescapable fact that Edward King is at the bottom of the sea. "Sunk though he be beneath the watery floor." This is not, as might be expected, a trivial point to make, for Milton's clear intention is to show the reader how death in its physical aspect must be comprehended in order to give the fullest meaning to the immortality which follows. Dryden does not give us the sharp immediacy of death. In the stanza quoted, Anne Killigrew apparently leaps from her grave with the impetuosity of Edna St. Vincent Millay in *Renascence*, though, it must also be confessed, without either Miss Millay's extraordinarily vivid manner of taking off or her humble tribute to God after her resurrection. To be sure, two stanzas earlier Dryden discusses the death of the young poet; but his description is so attenuated and so weakened by virtuous indignation because Miss Killigrew suffered not only death but disfigurement from smallpox that the reader fails to see in the passage anything more than a polite literary exercise. Milton's verse preserves with subtle skill the balance between the world of actuality and the world of the imagination. The magnificent figure of the setting sun brings before our eyes a phenomenon familiar to everyone who has scanned the heavens, the introduction of groves and streams gives the same sort of earthly resemblance to Paradise which we were to find later with such magnificent effect in *Paradise Lost*. The nuptial song, even the efforts at entertainment of the "Saints above," their tender solicitude for one in sorrow, all these elements, in spite of the fact that they appear in an imaginative

situation, have a poignant relation with our experience. There is, to be sure, one highly effective figure in Dryden's stanza—the line which describes the poets, who, after leaving the grave, "Like mounting larks, to the new morning sing." This has the freshness and the incisiveness of true poetry. Apart from this, however, the verse lacks clarity and force. It is hard to relate the sounding of the golden trump in mid-air, or the amazing assembly of rattling bones from all four corners of the sky, to any human action revealing struggle and growth.\*

Let us now examine more closely the actual expressions which Milton and Dryden have used in these passages, to see in what ways they do or do not suggest expansion rather than constriction, in other words, whether they enlarge the reader's understanding and emotional resources or leave him unmoved.

What first strikes the eye is that Milton has realized the effective combining of exposition and suggestion. This factor, so im-

\* By way of contrast to Dryden's heavy-footed resurrection observe the vividness and force of Ezekiel's vision in the Valley of Dry Bones

The hand of the Lord was upon me, . . . and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones, and caused me to pass by them round about and behold, there were very many in the open valley, and, lo, they were very dry. And he said unto me, "Son of Man, can these bones live?" And I answered, "O Lord God, thou knowest" Again he said unto me, "Prophesy upon these bones, and say unto them, 'O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus saith the Lord God unto these bones, 'Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live and I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live, and ye shall know that I am the Lord''" So I prophesied as I was commanded and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone. And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above but there was no breath in them. Then said he unto me, "Prophesy unto the wind, prophesy, Son of Man, and say to the wind, 'Thus saith the Lord God, 'Come from the four winds, O Breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.''" So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived; and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army

portant in poetry and in any kind of writing which aims in large part at emotional persuasion is difficult to analyze. This much, however, is certainly true—the greatest writing reveals of necessity not only the circumstantial situation itself, in varying degrees of particularity, it also makes use of overtones, through allusion, suggestion, and all the devices of figurative language. Dryden's lines are certainly less rich in overtones than Milton's. Though he is dealing with an imaginative situation his elaboration of material, with one or two exceptions, is unexpansive. For the most part it is a straightforward expository piece of writing, and this kind of expression is not the most effective for the particular situation Dryden has in mind. Milton, on the other hand, even though this passage is not so rich in overtones as a number of others in "Lycidas," persuades the reader more through sudden flashes of emotional insight than through sustained and studied exposition.

Let us examine the line "Sunk though he be beneath the watery floor." The key words here are "sunk" and "watery floor." Suppose, for the purpose of comparison, that for "sunk" we substitute "gone" or "lost." Neither of these words I believe carries the same weight as "sunk." "Gone" is too indefinite, too inactive, "lost" would seem to imply abandoned hope. "Sunk" not only is denotatively accurate but its connotations are appropriate. The imagination pictures Lycidas floating downward through the obscure depths to the lowest point it is physically possible to reach. With the nadir established through the use of the word "sunk" not only in the physical sense but also by way of suggesting the author's depression of spirit the zenith as pictured immediately following becomes more striking. Now what of "watery floor"? Could we substitute for these words "ocean wave," or "liquid floor"? Would "whelming tide," an expression Milton used

earlier, give the suggestion he wished? I think not. "Ocean wave" is trite and obvious, besides perhaps suggesting a sea more restless than was the case, the word "liquid" is pretension without excuse, a vague and pompous substitute. "Whelming tide" is admirable in the earlier context, when Milton was describing the way in which Lycidas's bones might be swept by the restless submarine currents "beyond the stormy Hebrides", it is not appropriate to the passage in question, however, since the author meant to suggest the calm sea upon which King's vessel foundered. "Watery floor" does accurately suggest the flat and deceptively solid appearance of the ocean at rest.

Milton continues his train of thought by the introduction of a simile which is striking in its effect. He compares the death and rebirth of Lycidas to the setting and the rising of the sun, the day-star. The comparison of Lycidas to the sun is a happy one, and even the frequent occurrence of such comparisons in English poetry cannot mar its effectiveness. The sun suggests much. it suggests by its position in the heavens association with the celestial rather than the earthly kingdom, it is aloof from the dangers and distresses of mortal life, a symbol of great power over which man has no control, it is a point of fixed enduring light, an eternal and mysterious flame. Observe that like Lycidas the daystar sinks into "the ocean bed." Thereafter the regeneration of the poet is vividly anticipated by the rising of the sun which

with new-spangled ore  
Flames in the forehead of the morning sky.

The impression created here, entirely by figurative means, is rich and powerful. The glory of Lycidas's transfiguration as allusively pictured, stresses sudden and dynamic expansion rather than static enumeration. One feels the transformation into new life.

The "ore" is "new-spangled"; it is clean and bright, freshly mined. "Ore" itself calls up associations that are fruitful. In the first place it suggests the reward of long search underground; once found it is not only set in the common earth and mixed with it, it is also a substance apart, of added value by the very fact of its contrast to baser substances. It is thus a part of the variegated tissue of life itself, the base and the precious lie side by side. Here, consequently, ore gives a vital breadth to the concept. Of "flames" it is hardly necessary to speak. The brilliance, the destructive or the life-giving force of fire, its vivid, active quality—all these have been recalled innumerable times by the poet. "Forehead" comes close to suggesting the "pathetic fallacy", that is, attributing animation to inanimate things. I believe that it escapes, however, because of the frequent use of "head" in the more general and figurative sense. In any case, when taken in conjunction with morning sky the impression is one of clear, dazzling radiance, absolute clarity of atmosphere, and freshness of view. So Lycidas, purged of his earthly burden, freed and purified, is born again. And note that he is reborn not through anatomical reassembling, as are the poets in Dryden's stanza, but through a spiritual process. Dryden badly mistook the uses of the imagination when he described the rattling bones flying together from the four corners of heaven. It is not well to be too exact and circumstantial in describing a supernatural situation. And especially it is not wise to linger on bones and sinews when souls are our concern. The uses of suggestion are legion, never are they of more consequence than when we are called upon to suspend our disbelief.

In the comparison of these two passages of poetry I have stressed two points first, the strong propelling charge of emotional persuasion and spiritual belief which makes literature an immediate personal concern, second, the ways in which authors

enrich our individual resources by the overtones of connotation, by including the penumbra as well as the central light.

Let us now go further into this matter of the penumbra to see if we can discover how far it is safe for the writer to venture. As a rough rule one may say that he may explore any mysteries he wishes, in his own experience or out of it, provided that he gives us an understanding of something more than a mere fondling of impressions. Each individual man is an enigma, the prey of half-formed thoughts, of velleities, of phantom tag ends of memory. Many authors, especially of our day, have given expression to the restless rise and fall and the subterranean surge of the human mind. Dark places never before imagined have been explored by the modern psychiatrist and by his literary cousins. This tendency often leads to the obscurity which has baffled so many readers.

Obscurity is a high hurdle to leap in any kind of reading. Generally speaking there are two kinds: first, the sort which arises when the author wrestles with an idea so important to him and to mankind generally that the answer almost if not quite eludes him, second, the kind that comes from the attempt to describe the particularity rather than the universality of experience, to describe the corpus of individual sensation and impression in kaleidoscopic fashion. In the first kind the effort is directed ultimately at pushing into the realm of belief; in the second into the field of social and psychological knowledge, in which the waifs and strays of man's mind are of scientific value. It is obscurity of the second kind which is particularly dangerous. We may be confused in reading Donne or Browning or Melville, but ultimately we come to see that they were urgently trying to express one single idea of tremendous force; when we read Joyce's *Ulysses*, or better still *Finnegans Wake*, or Eliot's *Waste Land* or Faulkner's *Sanctuary*, we realize that we have witnessed a clin-

ical dissection. A clinical dissection may be a very absorbing process, just as the work of these authors is often absorbing to a remarkable degree. The medical student, however, considers its chief usefulness the knowledge gained toward the achieving of human health. So should analysis be in literature, it should not merely be an intensive and ungeneralized study of the moment and the act. The dilemma of the sensitive modern artist finds expression in two lines from T. S. Eliot's "Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"

It is impossible to say just what I mean!

But as if a magic lantern threw the nerves in patterns on a screen.

It is this kind of esoteric pattern, unresolved beyond the impression of one acutely sensitive mind which not only hampers communicative power but also makes the reader feel that he is living in a world of shadows.

Consider now the following passage from James Joyce's novel *Ulysses*, describing Stephen Dedalus's reflections on the priestly office

And at the same instant perhaps a priest round the corner is elevating it. Dringdring! And two streets off another locking it into a pyx. Dringadrang! And in a lady chapel another taking housel all to his own cheek Dringdring! Down, up, forward, back Dan Occam thought of that, invincible doctor. A misty English morning the imp hypostasis tickled his brain. Bringing his host down and kneeling he heard twine with his second bell the first bell in the transept (he is lifting his) and, rising, heard (now I am lifting) their two bells (he is kneeling) twang in diphthong.

Cousin Stephen, you will never be a saint. Isle of saints. You were awfully holy, weren't you? You prayed to the Blessed Virgin that you might not have a red nose. You prayed to the devil in Serpentine avenue that the fussy widow in front might lift her clothes still more

from the wet street. *O sì, certo!* Sell your soul for that, do, dyed rags pinned round a squaw. More tell me, more still! On the top of the Howth tram alone crying to the rain *naked women!* What about that, eh? \*

Notice here that Joyce is not at all interested in objective exposition; he is completely within the consciousness of Stephen Dedalus, setting down without selection the swarm of ideas and sensations which pass through his head. The impression is one of profusion without fecundity, of a centripetal energy which forces experience into a series of narrow outlets where they dissipate themselves in a thin trickle. The overtones have drowned out the central theme. The centrifugal energy which makes the individual's sensations the center of a widening circle of generalized attitudes and beliefs is almost completely lacking. Here is particularity without meaning and insight without depth.

Compare with this passage one appearing in Joyce's earlier work, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Here the same Stephen Dedalus (that is, Joyce himself) is reflecting on the same problem of the priestly office:

The Reverend Stephen Dedalus, S.J.

His name in that new life leaped into characters before his eyes and to it there followed a mental sensation of an undefined face or colour of a face. The colour faded and became strong like a changing glow of pallid brick red. Was it the raw reddish glow he had so often seen on wintry mornings on the shaven gills of the priests? The face was eyeless and sour favored and devout, shot with pink tinges of suffocated anger. Was it not a mental spectre of the face of one of the Jesuits whom some of the boys called Lantern Jaws and others Foxy Campbell?

He was passing at that moment before the jesuit house in Gardiner

\* James Joyce, *Ulysses* (New York, Random House, Inc., 1922) Reprinted by permission of the publishers.

Street, and wondered vaguely which window would be his if he ever joined the order. Then he wondered at the vagueness of his wonder, at the remoteness of his own soul from what he had hitherto imagined her sanctuary, at the frail hold which so many years of order and obedience had of him when once a definite and irrevocable act of his threatened to end for ever, in time and in eternity, his freedom. The voice of the director urging upon him the proud claims of the church and the mystery and power of the priestly office repeated itself idly in his memory. His soul was not there to hear and greet it and he knew now that the exhortation he had listened to had already fallen into an idle formal tale. He would never swing the thurible before the tabernacle as priest. His destiny was to be elusive of social or religious orders. The wisdom of the priest's appeal did not touch him to the quick. He was destined to learn his own wisdom apart from others or to learn the wisdom of others himself wandering among the snares of the world.\*

The difference between these two passages—so striking that it is hard to realize they were both written by the same man—is not simply a matter of clarity, though certainly the Dedalus of *A Portrait of the Artist* is much more quickly visualized than the Dedalus of *Ulysses*. The distinction lies in the fact that the second passage reveals not only private meaning but ultimately, as a natural extension, general meaning as well. Joyce has not neglected here the force of subjective sensation and suggestion. This he has introduced in the associative train which leads Dedalus from his reverie on how his name would appear if he were in orders through the “mental sensation of an undefined face or colour of a face” and on to his linking of this sensation with the priest “whom some of the boys called Lantern Jaws.” There can be no question that in this passage the reader gets within the mind of the character described. Yet one always feels that it is not

\* James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (New York, Viking Press, Inc., 1925). Reprinted by permission of the publishers.

Dedalus simply talking or thinking to himself but that someone (and the someone is the author) is so revealing the situation that the young man takes his place also as a generalized phenomenon. He is here described, and very effectively described, as a person who though sensitively an instrument of private sensation is ultimately a man who has learned about himself. The scene, in other words, is one of expanding power, the scene from *Ulysses*, on the other hand, is as ingenious and as meaningless as the Lord's Prayer engraved on the head of a pin.

The sense of expanding power which a reader gets from literature is all-important. And, lest I be misunderstood in what I mean to say, this sense is possible even when the author is writing cryptically. Shakespeare's lyric "The Phoenix and the Turtle," for example, has baffled generations of critics, and one of the latest, Hazelton Spencer, in his *Art and Life of William Shakespeare*, even suggests that the poet wrote with his tongue in his cheek. I do not think so, even though the mythical mating of the phoenix and the turtledove is described in stanzas of puzzling abstraction:

Reason, in itself confounded,  
Saw division grow together,  
To themselves yet either neither,  
Simple were so well compounded,  
  
That it cried, "How true a twain  
Seemeth this concordant one!  
Love hath reason, Reason none,  
If what parts can so remain."

This poem illustrates what I have mentioned before: that the obscurity which springs from generality, from the attempt of the writer to express the ineffable, is less troublesome and less dam-

aging than the kind which springs from unselective particularity. For out of the poem emerges the general outline of a single elevated idea; namely, the unity and selflessness of a man and woman who love. And this idea does not have to be pieced together from fragments of impression in the mind of one introspective observer, it emerges rather from stanzas which describe the whole situation externally. In addition there is a strong surge of feeling, a force of imagery in the poem. The following stanzas have a picturesqueness and a majesty which actively free the imagination.

Let the bird of loudest lay,  
On the sole Arabian tree,  
Herald sad and trumpet be,  
To whose sound chaste wings obey.

But thou shrieking harbinger,  
Foul precursor of the fiend,  
Augur of the fever's end,  
To this troop come thou not near!

From this session interdict  
Every fowl of tyrant wing,  
Save the eagle, feath'red king,  
Keep the obsequy so strict

Let the priest in surplice white,  
That defunctive music can,  
Be the death-divining swan,  
Lest the requiem lack his right

I do not intend for a moment to say that "The Phoenix and the Turtle" is one of the greatest glories of English poetry or that its obliqueness is not difficult to accept. What I am trying to show is that the *meaning* of a poem need not be as plain as a pikestaff

so long as some powerful emotional force, if possible buttressed by visual imagery and by a fundamental idea of conduct, emerges objectively and not merely as subjective impressionism. In Shakespeare's poem the overtones make one reach outward rather than inward.

In the light of this statement it would be well to discuss an example or two of modern poetry, since in this field more than in any other the artist has been distrustful of traditional "meaning." Archibald MacLeish in *Ars Poetica* said:

A poem should not mean  
But be.

With that in mind, with what success does the "being" of W. H. Auden's poem quoted below persuade us?

Between attention and attention  
The first and last decision  
Is mortal distraction  
Of earth and air,  
Further and nearer,  
The vague wants  
Of days and nights,  
And personal error;  
And the fatigued face,  
Taking the strain  
Of the horizontal force  
And the vertical thrust,  
Makes random answer  
To the crucial test;  
The uncertain flesh  
Scraping back chair  
For the wrong train,  
Falling in slush,  
Before a friend's friends

Or shaking hands  
With a snub-nosed winner.

The opening window, closing door,  
Open, close, but not  
To finish or restore,  
These wishes get  
No further than  
The edges of the town,  
And leaning asking from the car  
Cannot tell us where we are;  
While the divided face  
Has no grace,  
No discretion,  
No occupation  
But registering  
Acreage, mileage,  
The easy knowledge  
Of the virtuous thing.\*

Here impressions and suggestions assail our minds as do the figures and shapes of buildings beside the swiftly moving train on which we ride. We see them for a second or two and then they are gone. As those objects are peripheral to our experience and are touched only by the trailing fingers of sensation, so also this poem is strangely fugitive in character. By reading carefully we can discover that Auden probably intended to describe the well-meaning person of shallow intelligence and flabby will. Yet the author wishes neither to clothe his idea in a symbol nor to speak with direct affirmation. Instead, his poem is a series of arcanal suggestions, perhaps of dynamic force to him, but for the most part an artificial veil of concealment to the reader. It is worse than a

\* From *Poems* by W. H. Auden, 1934. Reprinted by permission of Random House, Inc.

distortion of truth, it is using truth as a counter in a five-cent game. One looks in vain for the heat of belief, for the vivid impact of the world without. It is the world within which we see—and not the world of impulses fused into passions and animated by knowledge of experience and of self, but rather the little world of the man who fusses over a nosegay of artificial flowers. The overtones of suggestion in this poem are as anaemic as the glimpses of reality itself. One would think offhand that in a work so elliptical the possibilities of imaginative expansion would be great. This expansion depends, however, upon an emotional propelling charge and upon some acute sense of external reality. I find little of either in Auden's poem. It is hard to become unduly excited over so nebulous an image as a "fatigued face" which "makes random answer to the crucial test." "The uncertain flesh scraping back chair for the wrong train" is so vague in its suggestion that the reader might equally well feel either sympathy or irritation. In fact the work seems a very ghost of a poem, the product of dilution rather than distillation.

I should like now to compare it with a poem by another contemporary, a writer whose work has often caused trouble to readers. "The Hollow Men" by T. S. Eliot is not at all unlike Auden's poem in general subject matter. Here we have the same picture of arid and cautious conformity, the same sense of frustration.

We are the hollow men  
We are the stuffed men  
Leaning together  
Headpiece filled with straw. Alas!  
Our dried voices, when  
We whisper together  
Are quiet and meaningless  
As wind in dry grass

Or rats' feet over broken glass  
In our dry cellar.

Observe Eliot's incisive way of arousing attention at the outset. One of the hollow men speaks for his fellows in words charged with scorn. In a striking figure the hollow men are conceived symbolically as scarecrows in an image immediately and easily referable to common experience and also of perfect appropriateness. From the very beginning we are aware that the speaker in the poem does not stand alone, he sees his own deficiencies as those of a group. The feeling of aridity is established by clear and sinewy images—the headpiece filled with straw, the *dried* voices in a whisper, the wind in *dry* grass, and the scatter of rats' feet on bits of glass in a *dry* cellar. Here are the scarecrows, not even useful in a cornfield but leaning together in a dark cellar, companioned by rats.

But even though the hollow men are sunk so low, they are able to recognize their state, or at least their spokesman is. He reveals an objective knowledge of life and of the self which raises his utterance above the level of merely individual complaint. He sees beyond his present shabby state to another world—"death's other kingdom," so remote from his attainment—where

the eyes are  
Sunlight on a broken column  
There, is a tree swinging  
And voices are  
In the wind's singing  
More distant and more solemn  
Than a fading star.

But this kingdom is not for the hollow men, who wear

deliberate disguises  
Rat's coat, crowskin, crossed staves

and who

groped together  
And avoid speech  
Gathered on the beach of the tumid river.

The concluding section of the poem is quite different in method from the rest. Earlier, in support of the emotional outburst of the hollow men, vivid symbolic images and apperceptions of a physical world have appeared. Now, after the allusive bit of action in the first stanza below, the poet recapitulates in generalities.

*Here we go round the prickly pear  
Prickly pear prickly pear  
Here we go round the prickly pear  
At five o'clock in the morning.*

Between the idea  
And the reality  
Between the motion  
And the act  
Falls the Shadow

*For Thine is the Kingdom*

Between the conception  
And the creation  
Between the emotion  
And the response  
Falls the Shadow

*Life is very long*

Between the desire  
And the spasm  
Between the potency  
And the existence  
Between the essence  
And the descent  
Falls the Shadow

*For Thine is the Kingdom*

For thine is  
Life is  
For Thine is the

*This is the way the world ends*  
*This is the way the world ends*  
*This is the way the world ends*  
*Not with a bang but a whimper.\**

It will be observed that these lines not only state generalities; they are also elliptically attached to the problem of the hollow men. The author has abandoned his previous method of explanation. Some readers may be troubled by the first and last stanzas, and the interpolated comments, but I believe their meaning is clear. In the first stanza Eliot certainly intended to suggest in his variant of the well-known children's rhyme the monotonous circling around a sterile objective point (the prickly pear), and the stagnation of the man who has never ceased to be a child. In the opposition of "For Thine is the Kingdom" from the Lord's Prayer and the sentence "Life is very long" we see the hope of future salvation nullified by the weight of the world as it is. The broken fragments of these statements in the next to the last stanza indicate the paralyzing confusion which still characterizes the hollow men. Their world ends not with an affirmation of their strength but rather a confession of their weakness. "Not with a bang but a whimper." The other stanzas of this section carry out the same concept of futility at every time when the hollow men feel capable of creative activity "Falls the Shadow."

I have dwelt on this poem because it illustrates an important point in the persuasive power of literature. "The Hollow Men" is not immediately easy to grasp. It uses the symbolic and, es-

\* Thomas Stearns Eliot, *Poems 1909-1925* (New York, Harcourt, Brace and Co., Inc., 1925). Reprinted by permission of the publishers

pecially in the last section, 'the somewhat wry elliptical manner of exposition, one often feels that one is examining strange by-paths in the individual consciousness. Yet I believe that its emotional propelling charge, the fierce scorn and irony which animates the hollow men's confession of impotence, is unmistakable. And I believe also that it gives us some awareness of the world without as well as the world within, not only by its striking suggestion of familiar scenes, but also by its clear intention of showing the hollow men conscious of their fate. Certainly Eliot by his ingenious direction of strong feeling has been far more successful than Auden in showing us the ashen face of frustration.

And yet, powerfully as "The Hollow Men" moves us, we may sense that upon it also falls the shadow. Possibly it is our feeling that for the hollow men there stretches ahead only an eternity of suffering like that of Swift's Struldbrugs and Tennyson's Tithonus. And whereas in Swift and Tennyson the awful punishment descends because men dared to be gods, in Eliot one almost feels that they are doomed to life without faith and hope because they are men. Here is a wasteland of lost opportunities in which the passionate will to grow even through death seems to have disappeared.

It is this will to grow, to achieve, and not merely to endure which ultimately gives the highest persuasive force to literature. The author will not be content with static *being*, but will show life in the active process of *becoming*, and becoming something, moreover, in which man's spirit is a guiding force. To the accretive, assimilative function of knowledge he must add the force of wisdom. He must know and respect the duality of human nature, he must sense as the Psalmist did, the uniqueness of man's position —a little less than the angels and more than the beasts.

When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers,  
The moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained;  
What is man, that thou art mindful of him?  
And the son of man, that thou visitest him?

For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels,  
And hast crowned him with glory and honour.  
Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands,  
Thou hast put all things under his feet

All sheep and oxen,  
Yea, and the beasts of the field,  
The fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea,  
Whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas.

To his work the author must bring an ardent faith in the dignity of man as man. If he contents himself with the dramatic material of simple *being*, he does so at his peril. Ultimate persuasion demands an acute humane intelligence which catches instantly the permeation of tangible being by intangible faith. In whatever voice literature touches our minds, whether by direct and simple representation, or biting scorn, or the refreshment of laughter, or the sensitive revelation of beauty we must listen for the note which tells us of "brave translunary things."



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